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WORKS BY

Frederick C. Spurr

President National Free Church Council, England

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Jesus Christ and the Modern Challenge

CAN WE STILL BELIEVE IN HIS DIVINITY?

By

FREDERIC C. SPURR

President of the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches (Great Britain)

Author of "The Master Key"

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WITHDRAWN

Foreword

THE contents of this book were originally delivered as "Conferences" of an "Apologetic" character, to large audiences in Great Britain.

All of the chapters have been considerably augmented—some of them entirely rewritten. They are offered in this new form for the consideration, and it is hoped, the encouragement of men and women, who are perplexed by the religious controversies of our time, especially with respect to the Person of Jesus Christ.

F. C. S.

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I

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE QUESTION

CHRISTIANITY is wholly unique amongst the religions of the world. In the great historic religions there is always a definite human founder; a society which enshrines and carries out his ideas, and a set of doctrines which bind together the devotees. In every case the founder belongs to past history. He appears at a given moment in time to do his work and then passes away. His followers revere his memory, but none of them claims that he is now alive, the divine soul and director of the society which he created. The Jew would not dream of claiming this for Abraham or Moses, nor the Moslem for Mohammed, nor the Buddhist for Gautama. Christianity stands quite apart from the other religions of the world in virtue of the dominant faith that its founder is Divine, that He is really alive and operating by means of His Spirit in the world of to-day, that He alone is the Revealer of God and the Re-

deemer of mankind, and that He is the living soul of the Church. Christianity rests everything upon the *Person of Christ.* It is a one-person religion. It has its doctrines, but these depend upon Him. It thinks of God as He revealed Him. It regards man's sin and man's salvation, not alone in the light of human evolution, but supremely in the light of Christ. "Christianity is Christ."

The Church's central faith in Christ has never varied. It remains to-day what it was at the beginning. Many creeds have been composed, and many definitions have been offered of the Person of Christ, but in the end the faith of the Church always returns to the simple confession "My Lord and my God." We do not salute Him as the greatest of men, the "one perfect man the world has ever known"; we fall on our knees and worship Him as the supreme *Lord* of our life, "the word made flesh," the "second man, the Lord from Heaven," "Very God of very God." The Church believes that our Lord claimed to be this, and reverently accepts as the absolute truth His word "without me ye can do nothing." This belief in Jesus Christ is both intellectual and inward: of the mind and of the soul. Some there are, mere spectators who

remain outside the ring and know nothing of the thrill of Christian experience, who declare that the Church worships an idealized historical character. But it is the uniform *experience* of all who have fully surrendered themselves to Him that He is a living Saviour, who cleanses the conscience, delivers from the power of sin, and brings complete salvation to the whole life. The Christian life is founded not upon metaphysics nor emotional pictures, but upon an actual living experience of the regenerative force of the life of Christ which flows into faithful and trusting souls.

That there are difficulties in accepting this central faith of Christianity is a matter of common experience. These arise chiefly from two sources. Modern "Criticism" of the Bible is one, and modern Psychology is the other. It is supposed by some that the historical criticism of the New Testament has shaken to its foundations the ancient belief in our Lord's Divinity. Nothing is farther from the truth. For one thing a very clear distinction must be drawn between that "Criticism" which confines itself to its proper business, and rigidly adheres to the way of truth at all costs, and that miscalled "Criticism" which, starting with undisguised prejudice against religion as a

whole, and the Christian religion in particular, manipulates or explains the Christian facts in accordance with certain bigoted and unjustified preconceptions. There are extreme men who suffer from an obsession so acute that they have lost all sense of perspective and proportion. They merit the cutting description of Dr. Marcus Dods, who called them "myth maniacs." These extreme men may be left to themselves; time will deal justly, if cruelly, with them. As for that genuine, scholarly and reverent "Criticism" which set itself the necessary task of examining, *as history*, the records of the New Testament, has it yet established a single "finding" which in the least degree affects the central faith of the Church? If in the examination of "miracles" it has classified them, has it succeeded in abolishing them? Has the new light on the nature of matter done anything else but open the door a little wider for belief in the supremacy of spiritual forces over material, and thus bring within the range of credibility the "mighty works" of Christ? When all the smoke of battle over the Synoptic problem and that of the fourth Gospel has died down, the unique figure of our Lord remains exactly as before. Historical criticism has not rid us of Christ as we have always known Him.

Neither has Psychology. For two decades attempts have been made to probe to the inner consciousness of Christ, to rid Him of all "accretions" with which it was supposed the centuries had encrusted Him, and to present Him as a purely human figure belonging alone to the time and country in which He appeared. It is yet too early to say what will be the final finding of Psychology concerning Jesus. The process is yet going on and it is changing rapidly. The hour for dogmatic statement has by no means arrived. But thus far it is quite clear that whatever may be affirmed concerning the "human limitations" of our Lord's earthly life and the implications of His "self-emptying," the uniqueness of Christ remains unchallenged while the Divinity of Christ shines forth still more resplendent. There is no reason, therefore, for panic, while there is every reason for caution and the exercise of cool judgment upon new explorations which incline toward speed rather than toward security.

But Christianity is not only a faith, it is also a propaganda. It is out to conquer the world for Christ. It is not blind to whatever truth there may be in other religions; on the contrary, it increasingly recognizes that truth, but it knows also that this truth is mixed with

deadly error which vitiates it and also that it can never "arrive" apart from Christ. Christ alone, it unceasingly affirms, can purge the world of error (as of sin) and give completeness to truth which apart from Him must ever remain dwarfed and ineffective. It is when the Gospel becomes propagandist that it encounters opposition. The Early Church would never have been persecuted had the Christians been content to hug their faith as a personal boon to be enjoyed in private. But the divine "urge" was upon them as it must be upon every true believer, and they went out to conquer for Christ. It was this that brought them into conflict with the authorities and opened the way to prison and to death. It is this also that uncovers the guns of Rationalism to-day.

The proclamation of the Divinity of our Lord has always excited the opposition of the world. First of all—and nearest in time to Christ—came the Jewish assault. Then followed the Gnostic attack in the second and third centuries. Then the attack of the Vandals. Later came the Mohammedan opposition—the most serious that history has known—and finally the modern Rationalistic attack, which dates from the eighteenth century and which now approaches its climax. The form of these assaults has varied. Sometimes they

have been brutal; sometimes exceedingly polite and brilliantly conducted. But the fact remains that the opposition has endured for nearly two thousand years, which in itself is a magnificent advertisement of the vitality of the Christian belief. Men do not strike the dead, nor spend their strength in destroying things which are obviously impotent.

The newest form of the modern opposition has a character of its own. No longer do men say that Jesus is not Divine: they declare that we are more Divine. Thus the attempt is made to lessen the distance between Jesus and ourselves. Divinity, it is affirmed, is simply a question of degree. Jesus Christ occupies the front rank, and we the lower rank; yet we are all in the same file—He at one end and we at the other. The stream of Christian doctrine, so far as it concerns the Person of Christ, is, we are told, not absolutely pure. The Church has defiled it with man-made dogmas which have destroyed its beauty and truth. Our effort, it is claimed, is to try and cleanse that defiled current and so bring Jesus into our own category.

These and similar things perplex the average person to-day. He reads fragmentary reprints in the newspapers which attribute to avowed Christian leaders a scepticism which

appals and unsettles him. He has been given to understand that "scientific criticism" of the Bible has finally made impossible belief in the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hence he is befogged. On the one hand, he hears an age-long proclamation of the Christian faith which makes everything of the Divine Person of Christ. On the other, he hears many modern voices which dissolve the ancient faith into undefined vapour. What is he to believe? It is my purpose frankly to face the question of the Person of our Lord and to pursue a line of inquiry the result of which will be—it is confidently hoped—to give new courage to believing men and women, and to recover some who have become enveloped in the fog of doubt—that together these may kneel anew before the Redeemer and repeat from the heart the ancient confession "My Lord and my God." In a word that while the mind may be increasingly open to all light and knowledge from every quarter, yet the ancient faith may be held unimpaired in the plenitude of the intellect and of the heart, and with no sense of clash between the old and the new.

Four decades ago, Dr. R. W. Dale, then in the plenitude of his splendid powers, predicted that the day would soon arrive when the

greatest battle of the Christian Church would have to be fought, and that this battle would gather not around the documents of the Bible, but around the Divine Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. The event has proved the correctness of Dr. Dale's insight. We are at the present moment in the heat of that battle. It has been gathering force for nearly a century ever since the days of the Tübingen outburst. Less than twenty years ago Dr. Schweitzer issued a work which in English bears the title "The Quest of the Historical Jesus." It is the story of the growing Rationalistic attack upon the Person of Christ. The Dean of St. Paul's described the book as "blasphemous," but Dr. Schweitzer rendered to the world at least one service by its publication: he showed to what amazing lengths of folly and utter contradiction Rationalism has gone in its attack upon the central faith of the Gospel. He brought together in one volume all the theories indulged in by Rationalism during the last two hundred years to account for our Lord in what is claimed to be a "rational" manner. And it is only when the story of the whole effort is thus placed before us, that we clearly perceive how utterly unscientific and unhistoric is this particular Rationalistic method. For nearly every man who has essayed to account

for Christ on "naturalistic" grounds seems to have distinguished himself in one way only: he has invented a theory in opposition to that of his fellow Rationalists—that is all. And so the spectacle is offered of a number of men who set out to slay One whom they deem to be their common enemy, and end by slaughtering each other.

What kind of a Christ has Rationalism succeeded in offering to the world? The truth is that each school has its own theory and the resultant is amazing. To one school He is a pure myth: to others He is a mere figure of history—a Jew of His time—whose brief thirty years hold all of His career. To another He is a shadowy phantom which we perceive as in a mist. To another, He never existed at all. To yet another the story of His life is merely the few pages of the work of a religious novelist. Now with such a jumble of results all reached in the name of the "scientific method" we have the right to say that the obscurity with which His sacred figure has been surrounded is certainly not due to Him, but to the Rationalistic unscientific method of treating history. A method which results in such a medley of contradictions stands self-condemned. Not one of the Rationalistic theories, or all of them together,

account in the least degree for Him who is the life of the Church, and in spite of His foes, the Master of the world. If He were not so central in human life, why all this trouble to dispossess Him? How is it that Christ alone of all the teachers is subject to this incessant attack? The same critics who labour assiduously to dislodge Christ Jesus from His throne leave severely alone Buddha, Confucius and Mohammed. Why is Jesus singled out for their weapons? Is it that He of all is dreaded and that His kingdom which must be supreme or nothing is hated by men who believe in the " superman " of force and who cannot therefore endure the Gospel of love and that of obedience to our sole Divine Master?

We may not always judge, but it is significant that Dr. Schweitzer, in the work already cited, makes the startling admission that many of the so-called " lives " of Christ produced in his country (Germany) have been written from hatred. How can hatred ever arrive at the truth concerning the perfect Law and Life—the Lover and Redeemer of our souls? Hatred blinds and perverts. And with this qualification men sit down to write the life of Him who is eternal love! Is it surprising that they fail to understand it? Only love understands love. And even where there is no hatred, but

simply a critical spirit, there can be no understanding of Christ. The proud still are sent empty away: the humble and meek alone are admitted to the Great Secret. The self-sufficient think they do not need Him; they are chastised for their pride by an inability to understand Him. But where the sinner seeks for redemption, and weakness appeals for Divine Strength, there Christ appears to save and bless. To the one class Christ will ever appear enveloped in a mist: to the other He is the Light of Life.

"What think ye of Christ?" It is the test question for us all. He is either a temporal being whose life like that of the rest of men was fatally circumscribed within the limits of a transitory human existence, or He is the Eternal Son—the Christ of God whose existence preceded Bethlehem and outlived Calvary. If the former, then He was simply a man who established a religious system from which, in due time, death severed Him, and over which He has at present no power save that of a mythical and shadowy "influence." Being a man, this system is human and subject to all the fluctuations and emendations of human productions. His ethic may therefore be surpassed as humanity develops, and finally

Christianity may cease to be, or His connection with it will be no more than that of one who long ago initiated a human religion which His followers have so altered that it is no longer His. But if He is what the Church has ever affirmed Him to be, the Divine WORD, the one authentic Revelation of the Father, then human life lies in a special relation to Him. He becomes, not only its Saviour, but its Judge. Humanity is true or false as it follows or rejects Him and its fate is determined according to its choice or rejection.

It makes all the difference imaginable whether or not Jesus is the last word of God to man. Thousands have practically decided that He is not, hence they resort to spirits that peep and mutter or invent new religions, or become Epicureans, eating and drinking to-day with naught but death to follow to-morrow, or fall to the law of the jungle and revert to the beast. The world by common consent is in a desperate plight to-day. It owes its misery to the fact that it has rejected Christ as its King and Redeemer. Not until it crowns Him as Lord of all will it become its true self. The primary need, therefore, of the Church in this age is to reaffirm the truth, with all its implications for human life, of the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ—the world's only true Master.

II

"WHAT MANNER OF MAN IS THIS?"

LOGICIANS admit two great methods of demonstrating the truth of any proposition: the inductive and the deductive. The first deals with palpable facts and seeks their natural causes or principles; the second commences with the principles and then searches for corresponding results, applying the general law to particular cases. I propose now in considering the Person of Christ to follow the inductive method, marshalling incontrovertible facts and then demanding of these their radical and unique explanation. For the audience that I have in view this method is preferable to that of beginning with "proof texts." These will not be overlooked. We shall end with them.

We may begin with three indisputable facts. First, it is undoubted that the human setting of Jesus was of the lowliest. His mother was so poor that on the day of the purification, when the law demanded of her an offering in the temple, she could afford only the least per-

missible gift—a pair of doves. Our Lord, humanly speaking, had no social prestige. He was not born in the purple but in poverty. His neighbours, staggered at His knowledge, mentioned that He had not been trained in the schools. He was a working carpenter, and, so far as we know, He was untravelled. He never left Palestine. We are speaking of Him as men, unillumined, saw Him. Secondly, the public life of Jesus was of the simplest character. He lived in the full public light for nearly three years. He left no writing behind Him. His style of teaching was the essence of simplicity. He did not usually reason with His audiences and He proclaimed no philosophy. His method was popular. He "spake" to the people in the way of familiar conversation, conveying His teaching largely by means of parables. And at an early age—after less than three years of public ministry—He was crucified by His enemies, a method of death which was diabolically cruel and was reserved for criminals. There is no disputing the facts. Again we are speaking of Him as men, unillumined, saw Him. The third fact is that the influence of Jesus in the world has been absolutely unparalleled. No one has ever divided the world like Jesus Christ. No one has been or is so bitterly hated or so passion-

ately loved as He. He has captured the foremost nations of the world. The progressive peoples are Christians. None dare apologize for all that has been done in the Christian name, but the fact remains that the foremost nations of the world are those that bear the name of Christ. Even those who would deprive Him of His crown of Deity have paid Him a wholly exceptional homage, rising at times to panegyric. Ernest Renan was compelled to say of Him, "He is in every respect unique, and nothing can be compared with Him —He will never be surpassed." Friedrich Strauss in his fanciful life of Jesus has to admit that "It will never be possible to rise above Him, or to conceive of any equal to Him." Theodore Parker, the most advanced Unitarian of his day, asked, "What man, what century, has surpassed His thought?" Men who have broken with every evangelical truth have united in ascribing to Jesus an absolute supremacy and yet they have denied His Deity. Why is this? We shall return to this point in due course.

Meanwhile the logic of the situation lies in this, that those who attribute His supreme excellence to mere human sources, aim a blow both at God and at man. At God, for tanta-

lizing the human race by creating but one being capable of rising to the highest perfection: at man, for his degradation in failing to rise to the height of another man who climbed to the summit. This is the unescapable logic of claiming for Jesus the greatest human perfection and yet attributing it to a man's natural powers. If it is true, as Dr. Stopford Brooke said when he left the Church of England that "Christ reached His high excellence as a man and by a man's power," then we are compelled to ask where is another man who has reached this altitude? Why should He remain alone? What is the matter with the human race that one only of its number has been able to scale the mountain? "What man has done man can do." Why then does no other man do what Jesus did? The question must be faced. The humanitarian view of Christ does not in any satisfactory way account for Him. We are leaving alone for the time the direct claim that He made for Himself and that His disciples made for Him—that is to follow. We confine ourselves entirely to the inductive method. His human origin and setting were of the lowliest: His life and teachings were of the simplest, and yet His age-long influence has been and is unparalleled. This must be accounted for and that adequately.

One day, the Gospels tell us, when Jesus and the disciples were crossing the lake of Galilee in a little boat, a violent squall sprang up, threatening the lives of the little crew. Jesus was so tired out that He had fallen into a profound sleep. The disciples had to waken Him and then, speaking to the storm, He said, "Peace be still" and immediately there was a great calm. The rough boatmen, astounded, cried, "*What manner of man is this?*" That He was a man there could be no doubt. A moment earlier He lay tired out and asleep. Now He is seen to be Master of the storm. There was a *plus* in Him for which they could not account. And it is just that *plus* we must face. It is the distinctive thing in Him. It impressed the rough boatmen, but it has also impressed everybody else from that hour until the present. Pontius Pilate quailed before it. The Church worships before it. It is the *plus* in Christ that is the age-long puzzle of the critic and the age-long joy of the Christian. The Jesus of the Gospels, the Jesus of history —is thoroughly human. Everywhere upon the Gospel page we encounter the figure of a real man. The New Testament never attempts to do what certain first century philosophers essayed—to treat the humanity as unreal. On the contrary it emphasizes that humanity in

the most pronounced manner. "In all things he was tempted as we are, yet without sin." And yet without the least clash or sense of incongruity, they who tell the story of His humanity are the very people who speak of Him as their "Lord and their God," who declare that He came down from heaven; that He is the one and only authentic revelation of the Father. They found the *plus* in the fact of our Lord's Deity. But I am anticipating. Let us still keep to the inductive method.

There are three points to which especial attention must be directed and these involve an analysis of the personality of our Lord. With the profoundest reverence the task is undertaken. First we think of the *intellect* of Jesus. It is partly as a teacher that He appeared, and it is mainly as a teacher that many think of Him to-day. For us who are His disciples this view of Him is by no means sufficient, but it is part of the truth concerning Him. He was, then, a teacher, and by general admission the Supreme Teacher. His contemporaries were "astonished at his doctrine." The police of the temple who were sent to silence Him returned to their masters empty-handed, declaring they could not arrest Him; His word had conquered them; "never

man spake like this man." For two thousand years men have repeated that encomium. With the exception of a handful of secularists who, like the famous Tooley Street tailors, imagine that they are "the people of England," the civilized world of Christendom, whether loving Jesus or not, repeats that word "never man spake like this man." Time has not diminished, it has but augumented the Divine force of His Word. But to understand the uniqueness of our Lord's teaching, it is necessary to examine it carefully. What are its characteristics?

First, it is *superlative*. He said the highest thing and He said it *finally*. That perfect drama of human sin and return to God is set forth in a story which can be read in five minutes. But who else has ever said *all* in so small a space as Jesus did in the story of the Prodigal Son? In the *Pater Noster* our Lord has compressed the whole science and mystery of prayer into eight sentences. And so it is with all else He said. He strikes ever the final note. When He speaks of a thing there is nothing more to be said. A second characteristic is that it is *illuminative* and not logical. Human teachers reason, argue, convince; they must "prove" their case. Our Lord never did this. He said, "I say unto you," and when

He said it men saw that it was so. His words were as light: they carried with them their own authenticity. A third characteristic is *penetrativeness*. Jesus always went to the heart of things. Others condemned the sinful act, He condemned the motive and the thought. Anger with our brother without cause is murder. The lustful thought is adultery. It is in the heart man is right or wrong, He says. Hence His great word, "Ye must be born again." A fourth characteristic is the *personal authority* of His word. Other teachers quote authorities or support themselves upon principles. No man dare face an audience and offer his own personal dictum upon any great subject as the last word of authority. But Jesus did. His "I say unto you" was final. He was His own authority. *And the world knows He was right.* There are more people than ever now engaged upon the task of trying, as they think, to discover what He meant for the world. And the astonishing (and challenging) thing is that amongst these are large numbers of people who have no relationship with His Church, nor fellowship with His people.

A final characteristic is the *perpetuity* of His teaching. He spake to all peoples and to all time. His word is timeless. It is as fresh

and binding to-day as ever it was. It is not and cannot be outgrown, His enemies being witnesses. Heaven and earth will pass away, His word will never pass away. He is the one Teacher whose doctrine never needs correction; whose word satisfies human need to the end of time. Thus, all too briefly, we have glanced at the intellect of Jesus and at the character of His teaching. It is wholly unique. But if it is only the teaching of a man how can we account for it? We have again to ask "What manner of man is this?" And again we are driven to the *plus* to account for Him.

But there is more in Jesus than the intellect of the teacher. There is the *heart* of Jesus to be considered. The heart is greater than the intellect, as Pascal said: it has its reasons of which the reason knows nothing. The world has known many brilliant teachers, even religious teachers, whose intellects have scintillated, but whose hearts are cold and repellent. How few indeed possess anything like an equipoise between heart and brain! But behold the heart of Jesus—it is as perfect as His mind. He was the most popular figure in the country, so popular that the people desired to make Him King. And how did He deport Himself? The individual to Him was equally precious as

the crowd. From addressing the multitude He turns directly to heal a solitary leper—an exile from society. Fresh from a crowded synagogue He enters Simon Peter's home and restores to health a sick woman. For the daughter of the ruler He has the beautiful word: "My little darling, arise." He gave His best to the very worst. Most great teachers reserve their best for the best. Jesus never reserved His pearls for the élite. To the ignorant woman of Samaria He disclosed the truth that "God is Spirit." For lost women He had the Gospel of spiritual and social redemption, and to one of them He addressed one of the greatest of His discourses. For all the needy He had compassion; for all the disinherited, courtesy and the message of hope.

He brought into one fellowship a Bolshevist (Simon the Zealot) and the man Simon hated (Matthew the tax-farmer). And, miracle of miracles, he brought together into His own and their own fellowship two typical women whom society forever separates: Joanna the wife of Herod's steward—*the* lady of the North—and Mary Magdalene "out of whom had gone seven devils." Who else could have brought into one real sisterhood two women such as these? To the man who "found hell about his lips"—Judas Iscariot—our Lord has only

the word "friend" to utter. For the city that rejected Him, He has only the scalding tears of Divine compassion. To that Apostle who, under the pressure of fear, denied Him thrice with oaths and curses, Christ makes the answer of a reproachful and loving look, which three days later is confirmed by a special interview and a particular forgiveness, and later still by a restored Commission. For children He had a special affection. He made them the model for His disciples, and became forevermore their chief patron and friend. His word "suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not" has become the charter of the emancipation of childhood for all time.

Such then was the heart of Jesus. Few public men can bear the test of popularity. Men who can command the crowd are often impatient with the individual. But Jesus loved all. *What manner of man is this?* And once more we are driven to the *plus* to account for Him.

But there is a deeper region still for us to enter. It is the most sacred of all—*it is His holiness.* The world has known many great and good men brilliant in intellect and great in soul: it has known but one sinless man. The best men have always acknowledged a great abyss between themselves and Jesus Christ.

Dr. Channing, Unitarian by label and Christian in spirit, declared that "Jesus puts in the shade all human perfection." And that is the verdict of the humanity which knows Him. *The notion of sinlessness was not in the world until Jesus came.* It was derived, not from any philosophical speculation, but from the actual fact of Christ Himself, in whose person the idea was realized. "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" was His challenge, and it remains unanswered. Those who, in the days of His flesh, knew Him most intimately were the first to declare that "He was without sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." Before His Holiness all heads bow. "He is the Saint, the one perfect man," said Goethe.—To understand what this means, however, it is necessary to enquire what we mean by holiness. In Christ was not merely the absence of evil qualities, there was the presence of perfect qualities in all the regions of life. Holiness is a positive quality, and *it may be defined as consisting in the perfect relation of man to God, to himself and to his fellows.*

What was the relation of Jesus to God? Viewed on the *negative* side, it consisted in an entire absence of anything like disharmony, rupture, incompleteness, or the sense of sin in any form.—Jesus never made confession of sin

to the Father. He offered no apology for any word, or thought or deed of His. He taught His disciples in their prayers to say "forgive us our trespasses," but He admitted no trespass of His own.—The records show Him as in frequent communion with God, they never report one word about any confession of sin He made to God. Viewed on the *positive* side, the relation of Jesus to the Father was that of unclouded fellowship. He Himself summed it up in a sentence when He declared "I do always the things that please him." The whole picture of His life, as portrayed by the Gospels, perfectly matches this description.

Let us think what this means. For one thing it is absolutely unique in human experience. The holiest man that ever lived has never passed through life without making constant confession of sin and shortcoming. The nearer man approaches the Eternal Light, the more is he aware of the imperfections of his own nature. The Church is rich in "Confessions" made by the Saints, but in every one of them the note of unrealized good, and of committed evil is present. The greatest Saint has not dared to say "I do always the things that please God"; at the best he has said "I try to please Him but I have my faults." What then shall

we say of Jesus who, admittedly by all, knew God best and most completely revealed His character, and yet claimed to be entirely harmonious with Him? A person who holds the high view of God that Jesus did, and yet admits no defect in his relation with Him, is in one of two situations: he is either so vain and self-deceived that he is not capable of understanding the hidden evil of his nature, or he is so good that he is beyond the common measure. Can any one doubt where, in this dilemma, the truth lies?

Let us pass to the second question.—What was the relation of Jesus to His fellows? Again the record, after criticism and psychology have expended their entire force upon it, shows a perfect relation. Jesus never failed any one. He made no promise that He did not fulfil. He offered no bribe for discipleship. He neither flattered the great nor patronized the small. He would not receive the rich because they had wealth, nor reject them because they were rich. He loved the poor not because they were socially separated from others, but because they were humanly needy. He knew no "class": He regarded human beings for what they were humanly worth, or for what they were capable of becoming.—He

rejected the usual estimates of men and propounded new human values. Publicans and harlots, commonly regarded as being on the scrap heap, were treated by Him as only "lost"—that is, they had to be found again and He came to find them. When He found them they also "found" themselves. A Mary Magdalene became a Saint and a Dismas, expiating his crimes upon a cross raised by a world that killed thieves, was given the chance of Paradise. Women, branded by the society of His day as the inferiors of man, were elevated by Him to the highest and divinest fellowship, with man and with God. From earthly honours He turned away; the only crown He wore was made of thorns. And at the end He gave His life for the salvation of the world, thus reaching the final altitude of love.

The third question remains to be answered, what was His relation to Himself? It can be answered in a word: *It was that of a perfect equilibrium* between all the parts. In His humanity were all those elements which belong to our race. Every natural passion was there, and every natural faculty, yet never was there the least clash or the least disproportion between them all. Gentle and compassionate, He was also angry when evil in any form

threatened the handiwork of God in man. He was never angry or even ruffled when personal affronts were paid to Him. In His last agony He uttered no word of malediction upon His enemies. Rather He prayed for them. When Pilate uttered his word "*Ecce homo*" there was no moral or religious content associated with it in the mind of the Pro-Consul, but the Church has not gone astray when it has invested Pilate's word with a higher meaning and used it to express its belief that in Jesus Christ there stood a perfect man.—And Pilate's confession "I find no fault in him" has been endorsed by the considered judgment of two millenniums of mankind. If holiness, then, consists in a perfect relation of man to himself, to his fellows and to God, Jesus was preëminently and uniquely holy. None other can be placed in the same category with Him.

We are bound therefore in this light to put the radical question "*What manner of man is this?*" How shall we account for Jesus Christ? Has He been invented, or idealized, or is He photographed from life? Has He been invented? But who invented Him? John Stuart Mill, an avowed unbeliever—in his famous lectures on Theism asks: "Who amongst the disciples of Christ or amongst their proselytes was capable of inventing the

sayings ascribed to Jesus, or matching the type of character revealed in the Gospels?" If Christ has been invented or idealized, then the problem is only removed one degree further back, since we have to discover an unknown writer, a genius of the first water, who was equal to the task of creating such a being as Jesus Christ. This simply complicates the situation. No! He has not been invented nor idealized; nobody was capable of inventing *Him*. Then He has been photographed. We have in Him a Figure from real life.

Is it possible to escape this conclusion? The hypothesis that legendary matter has been added to the Gospels and that the presence of miracle in the records vitiates the whole account, does not in reality even remotely touch the question we are dealing with and which, after all, is the main question. The real question is the *ensemble*—the total picture given to us of Jesus Christ, not alone in the Gospels, but in the whole of the New Testament. The details may be left aside for the moment and the question of miracles reserved. It is with the *Character* of Jesus that we are now concerned and we must not be side-tracked by any other question. One point of great importance needs emphasizing, which is that the earliest writing in the New Testament—anterior to the

Gospels—presents us with a view of the Person of Christ which demands the Gospel narrative to complete it on the historic side. By general admission St. Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians is one of the early documents of the New Testament, dated in the early fifties.[1] Let any careful and unbiased person study the portrait of Christ as it is presented in that letter, and then ask whether the hypothesis of "legend" does not visibly shrink to small dimensions!

We have to return to our starting point. If it be true, as Dr. Stopford Brooke phrased it, that "Jesus reached His high excellence as a man, and by a man's power alone; and it is a clear disclosure that our nature is capable of reaching the same height," then, I repeat, we are compelled to enquire, Where is the second to Him? Why should He remain alone? If He is only a man and by His own effort He reached that height, the mystery of life is increased, for it means that in the whole history of humanity one man alone has been able to reach the summit. And that, again, means that the rest of us stand absolutely condemned in His presence, for we have failed to do what He did when, according to this theory, we might have done so. Or it means this: it is

[1] See upon this point the next chapter.

the most serious reflection upon God's providence. Could we believe in God if we accepted Dr. Brooke's theory? Should we not have to say, "O God, here is humanity crying for you. You have made us all, and yet of all the millions you have made, only one man has been capable of reaching the height that we all admit Christ reached. Why were we all not made thus?" To say that Christ is merely a man increases the mystery of human life, and imperils the Fatherhood and providence of God.

There is only one logical conclusion at which we can arrive. It is the conclusion presented by the New Testament and the Church, that Jesus Christ is the God-man. The only answer that satisfies the intellect and the heart concerning Christ is the ancient answer, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

III

THE TRIUMPH OF THE LIMITLESS LORD

WE have arrived at the point where we see clearly that there is a *plus* in Jesus Christ, possessed by no other person who has ever been upon this planet and that this compels us to answer the question, "What manner of man is this?" But now, having gone so far, we are compelled to go farther. It is not simply with the Christ of the Gospels that we are concerned, but with the Christ of history. For nearly two thousand years He has reigned, overcoming the obstacles of space and of time and fashioning the lives of unnumbered millions of His disciples throughout the world. The Christian society exists as a universal society—nothing is more certain than that. And it exists because of Him. Divided as Christians are upon many points—some of them very serious ones—they hold, as bodies, one common faith. Roman, Greek, Anglican and Free Churches all profess their faith in the Divinity of our Lord. Now the society which professes this belief, composed as

it is of Christians who differ from each other upon many points, is a living palpable phenomenon at work under our eyes.

It, like every other society, is an effect and demands an adequate cause. Its origin is historic. There would have been no Christians in the world had there been no Christ. No one can reasonably doubt that Jesus created the society which bears His name. The building exists. He is undoubtedly both its architect and builder, the living cause of the most remarkable effect the world has ever seen. From the beginning of the Church's history to the present hour the central faith of the Church has never varied. Every branch of the Church offers prayers which all can follow and sings hymns and canticles in which all can join. And at the core of the prayers and the songs there lies belief in the Divinity of Jesus Christ. Are the prayers addressed to the Father? It is "through Jesus Christ our Lord." The classic hymns of the Church—the common property of all—express in varied tones this one common faith. The *Te Deum* in which Christ is adored as the King of Glory, as the Redeemer of men, as the opener of the kingdom of heaven, as the final judge of men, as the object of our hope and the goal of our desires, is the one classic hymn of Christendom

which sums up, not theologically, but practically the great faith.

The sacraments, which are public acts, witness the same faith. Baptism is performed in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, or as in certain early cases, "in the name of the Lord Jesus." The Lord's Supper finds its centre in Jesus Christ. In it we remember Him and mystically feed upon His flesh and blood, thus expressing our deepest faith that He is our very life. The Church reserves one day in every week for the public worship of Almighty God. This day is not the Jewish Sabbath. It is a new day—the first day of the week—established because Christians believe that on that day Christ rose again from the dead and showed Himself to be the "Son of God with power." The Christian Sunday, if we will only trouble to remember the fact, is a witness to the belief in the Divinity of our Lord.

Now it is this fact of the Church as the creation of Christ and as His perpetual witness that modern Rationalism has never fairly faced. It spends its time at what it imagines to be the "sources" and misses the mighty river which flows past its door. It will not do to say with a modern sceptic "Christianity owes a great deal to the fact that Constantine *adopted* it as

the state religion of the Roman Empire," adding with touching naïveté "the *rise* of Christianity was made possible by the act of Constantine." Not to stress the nonsense which attributes the *rise* of a thing to something which followed it three centuries later, it is the simple fact that Constantine's adoption of Christianity as the official religion was the very worst service he could have rendered it. It was a disaster, and set back the clock to an extent which even now we can hardly realize. The Church, then, has to be accounted for, with its vitality and its attachment to a living Lord, despite all the setbacks and errors which have marked its course. It can be accounted for alone by Christ—but by what kind of a Christ? *Only by a Christ who answers to the faith of the Church,* and here at once we are placed in the presence of a miracle: the miracle of the triumph of the limitless Lord.

Let us see what this involves: the greatest force in life is personality. All the knowledge that we possess comes to us through persons. Our characters are formed by persons more than by precepts. A child learns not so much by what it is taught vocally, as by what it sees in persons. The personality of the parents is the greatest force of teaching for the child's life. The private life of the world is most in-

fluenced by persons, beginning with father and mother, brother and sister, in the family circle, and enlarging into that greater life where we are gradually admitted. In every case personal influence moulds, makes or mars our lives. The public life of the world, too, is most influenced by personality. The politician who exercises the greatest influence does so largely on account of his personality. However good a man's principles may be in the political world, there must be a magnetic personality behind them before the crowd will seize them and apply them. In music, in art, in literature—everywhere indeed, when we get to the root of things we find that personality is the greatest human force.

Now all human personalities are subject to the fatal drawback of limitation—the limitation of space and of time. First, space. There is no such thing in the world as a human personality imposing itself *universally* either in the sphere of politics or religion. The influence of the politician is limited to his party. The real statesman who is monarch in his own land is often a mere name elsewhere. The great founders of religions in the world have all been fatally circumscribed by space. Abraham remains a Semitic, Mohammed an Arab, Gautama an Indian, and the religions they founded

bear the same marks of limitation. They can never become universal, partly because of the fatal influence of space.

The second limitation is that of *time*. Time disintegrates every human work of the brain or of the hand. It plays havoc with persons. The passing of time diminishes their influence, until finally it disappears. Socrates was in his day the idol of Athens. His name retained part of its magic for a few years but now he lives only as a memory. And so it is with every great human personality. The cause may live on in some form or other. The ideas of the great teacher may be preserved in writing. But they are not immutable. The modern Jew does not feel himself bound to Moses as did the Jew of yesterday. The educated Moslem is beginning to "interpret" Mohammed. No man living would calmly and in the plenitude of his reason sacrifice his life for *personal love* of Moses, Mohammed, Gautama. Time surrounds all historic figures with a mist or a halo: it leaves them only as pictures or memories.

One Person and one only has escaped this universal law—Jesus Christ. He is the sole One who has conquered space. He alone is the "Son of Man"—neither Jew, Roman or Greek—but the Son of *Man*. He belongs

to the entire human race. He has upon Him the universal mark. His disciples are of all peoples. Faith in Him is naturalized in both hemispheres and in every clime. The stalwart sons of the North, hardened by cold and frost; the dreamy sons of the South, relaxed by the caresses of an unfailing warmth; the imaginative children of the East, and the unromantic sons of the West alike have overturned their idols to worship the One true God and His Son Jesus Christ. Fijians, Tierra del Fuegians, the savages of New Guinea, the Esquimaux, Greenlanders, Icelanders—men of all races have become the disciples of Jesus Christ. The statement is easily made, but it is astonishing to the last degree when its import is grasped. For this conquest of space is unknown to any human religious society. Buddhism is fatally encircled within the boundaries of two eastern kingdoms; it has no power to pass the frontiers and to capture the forward nations of the West. Mohammedanism, which set out to conquer the world by the sword, has been forced back and confined to the desert and to decaying peoples. But the faith of Christ is established in the bosom of all nations and where it has taken up its abode men have lifted up their hearts and rejoiced.

This is nothing less than a miracle, for space

is the most formidable obstacle to human fellowship. What appeals to people in the temperate zones is repellent to those in the torrid zones and *vice versa*. Increase space and the obstacle grows, until at last men at the extremes have nothing whatever in common with each other. But Jesus Christ has surmounted this obstacle. When He was in the flesh there was the magnetism of His wonderful personal presence, that wonderful face; that attractive manner; those pearls of wisdom and of life that fell from His lips, the gentleness of His heart. But He died and the world ceased to behold Him. Yet His passing made no difference to the millions who became His disciples. They knew that He lived in them and although they saw Him not yet they loved Him. "Whom having not seen *ye love*." The early Church, which never saw Jesus in the flesh, lived in Him and for Him and cheerfully died for Him.

And so it has been during two thousand years. Jesus has been and is *personally* loved, as if He were indeed present, which, in fact, He is. And He is loved by people of all temperaments, ardent and cool alike. Christianity is declared to be, by some, a matter of temperament. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Christianity is not a matter of temperament

at all. If it were, we should find persons of only one temperament attached to it. But the history of two thousand years shows us persons of every temperament exhibiting the same devotion, the same attachment to Jesus Christ that characterized apostolic life. In the South Seas are men tanned by the hot sun, men of ardent temperament—yesterday cannibals—now changed by the preaching of the Cross of Christ. And it is the same in the frozen North, where perpetual cold reigns. Here, where the sun is fierce, and there, where it is absent—it makes no difference to devotion. When these people of different temperaments attach themselves to Christ, there is kindled in their hearts a passionate devotion to the Person of the Son of God. Christ has accomplished the miracle, He has triumphed over the obstacle of space.

He has also triumphed over the obstacle of *time*. If space is fatal to personal influence, time is fatal to personal affection. All human love is affected by absence or death. Time softens the blow and heals the wound and opens up the way to a new affection which removes the old to the place of pleasant memory. The good and great man inspires affection *while he is alive* and while his personal magnetism endures. But after his death the charm

is removed; the passing of the years changes the perspective. Others rise up who claim affection and loyalty. Men easily transfer their devotion and their affection.

But there is one, and one only, exception to the rule. Jesus Christ, who lived here nearly two thousand years ago is loved to-day, I repeat, as if He were still here. It is a phenomenon which abides alone. There is nothing else like it in the world. It is not His memory alone that Christians prize: it is His person, real and living; a presence realized here and now. His words as recorded in the Gospels are treasured, but Christian ears also listen for His loving voice to speak to their inward selves. It is not a teacher who *was,* but a Lord who *is,* whom they adore and with whom they commune. This love for Jesus is not equally strong in all Christian hearts, nor is it always at white heat. Often it smoulders, but it never expires. When it is perfect it raises the human spirit to an altitude which others never reach. It has created a Livingstone, a Xavier, a Moffat, a Paton, a Bernard and a million more who for love of Him have renounced every prospect in life, journeying to the farthest points of the compass, life in hand, enduring poverty, hunger, untold dangers, burning and reviling and even death itself. And is He only

a *man* who has inspired all this devotion? It is impossible. If Jesus be but a man, and as a man has wrought this wonder, then we must award the palm to idolatry since it is the supreme force of life. But He is more than a man. Only God could produce so great marvels and triumph so wonderfully. Again we have to say that nothing less than the confession of the Church can adequately account for Jesus—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

IV

THE FAITH OF THE CHURCH

WE now reach the very heart of our theme. There can be no doubt that the Church of God throughout its long history has held firmly to the belief in the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whether that belief be true or untrue is not the question for the moment; the point is that the Church has unwaveringly held it. As evidence of this there may be cited the ancient creeds of the Church and the great confessions of the Reformed Churches. The truth or otherwise of the substance of these creeds and confessions is not before us for analysis at this juncture, but we are entitled to use them as evidence of what the Church has always believed. The Apostles' Creed names "Jesus Christ as His only Son, our Lord." The Nicene Creed, recited at the Holy Communion, names the "one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God—God of God—of one substance with the Father—who is worshipped and glorified." The Athanasian symbol declares our Lord

Jesus Christ to be "God and man"—perfect God, perfect man, "yet one Christ." The numerous "confessions" of the Reformed Churches are quite explicit upon the subject of our Lord's divinity. Waldensian, Moravian, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist—hundreds of them—differing as they do upon vital points, are one in this—that they accord to Jesus Christ the chief place and name Him as "Lord and God."

In the Church of the first four centuries fierce battles were fought over the person of Christ and later again in the eighteenth century, but each battle has ended in a fresh declaration of the "catholic" faith concerning our Lord's divinity. Sections have split from the main body with the avowed purpose of denying His Divinity, but these have always been small. Some who have confessed the Divinity of Christ have done so in terms which appear thin and anæmic beside the rich confession of the "catholic" faith. But speaking of the Church as a whole, its faith in the "proper Godhead" of our Lord Jesus Christ has been unvarying.

Modern Rationalism declares that this faith does not repose upon stable foundations, that it is not historically related to anything that Christ Himself taught; that in fine it is a *perversion* of the simple faith which characterized

the primitive Christians. We are told categorically that Jesus Himself never claimed to be what the Church alleges Him to be and that He professed no relation to God which is not also the relation of every man to Him. That if He was the Son of God it was only in the sense that applies to every person.

Here then is a distinct challenge and we accept it cheerfully. The question we have now to ask is—did Jesus affirm His Divinity in terms explicit or implicit? Do the primitive documents of Christianity—that is the New Testament—contain the materials, fluid or fixed, for the developed belief of the later Church? It is vital to know what Jesus taught about Himself. It is also vital to know what His earliest disciples thought of Him. There have been bitter critical controversies concerning the authorship and the dates of the books of the New Testament. But it is now generally agreed that one of the earliest documents, if not the earliest, in the New Testament, is St. Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, while Harnack has put it, finally, beyond doubt that the third Gospel is really the work of St. Luke, the companion of St. Paul. The implications of these admissions are enormous, as we shall see. How, then, does the earliest document in the New Testament speak of

Jesus Christ? Written probably in the spring of the year 52 A. D. or possibly earlier, within twenty years of the crucifixion—Jesus is referred to thus: "The Church . . . in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ" (1: 1); "our Lord Jesus Christ" (1: 3); "his Son from heaven whom he raised from the dead" (1: 10); "may our God and Father himself, *and our Lord Jesus,* direct our way unto you" (3: 11); "the coming of the Lord Jesus with all his saints" (3: 13); "we believe that Jesus died and rose again" (4: 14); "salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5: 9); "the will of God in Christ Jesus" (5: 18).

Observe that in the most natural manner and without any "apologetic" purpose whatever, God and Jesus are bracketed together as one. The two are never separated for a moment. No attempt is made to demonstrate the divinity of Christ. The Thessalonians became transformed men through the preaching of the Gospel. They knew the saving "power" of Christ in experience (1: 5). Christ did for them what only God could do and from the beginning they gave to Him the first place and spake of Him in the same breath with God the Father. And so it is in every one of St. Paul's epistles. In two places the great apostle pro-

pounds a *doctrine* of our Lord's divinity—Philippians 2 and Colossians 1—in which Christ is set forth as "the image of the invisible God" who was "in the form of God" and in whose name "every knee shall bow."

These great passages demand the closest study. We have not now the space in which to expound them. But the great point to be observed is that this "developed" doctrine of the Godhead of Christ, as it is called, is justified *by the general attitude of all the epistles toward Him.* It is not, as some claim, an exceptional statement due to the thinking of one apostle. *It represents the faith of the entire primitive Church.* Let the reader be at the trouble to collect every reference to our Lord in the epistles and the book of the Apocalypse and see if this be not so. It is no question of "proof texts" or special pleading, it is a question of a literature *shot through* and *through* with belief in the deity of Christ and if this belief were, by a literary manœuvre, to be withdrawn from the New Testament epistles, there would be nothing left to hold them together. They would fall apart. This much every unprejudiced person must surely admit, as a matter of simple fact. What is there left, for example, in the Epistle to the Hebrews if the great opening sentences are excluded:

"His Son . . . who being the effulgence of his glory and the very image of his substance"? This is the key-note to which the rest is set. Or take the book of the Apocalypse. The whole book turns upon the person of Him who is its chief figure and it too would fall to pieces if He were withdrawn from it. But how is He spoken of in its pages? As "him who loosed us from our sins in his blood," as "Alpha and Omega," as the holder of "the keys of death and of hades," as the "Lamb upon the throne," as the "Word of God" evermore to be worshipped and adored.

Men may disbelieve in His divinity, but they cannot deny that the primitive Church adored Him as the supreme Lord. I would affirm further that the main clauses of the Nicene Creed contain no confession of faith in Christ which may not be legitimately derived from the epistles of the New Testament.

But from the primitive Church we must now appeal to Christ Himself. Many who admit as a matter of history the belief of the early Church in our Lord's divinity, declare that such a belief does not rest upon any claim made by Jesus Himself. Paul, they tell us, is the true founder of Christianity, as it has been historically developed, and Paul, they say, misunderstood Jesus. Did he? Further, it

is said that the fourth Gospel, which undoubtedly sets forth the Godhead of Christ, differs radically from the first three Gospels, and that therefore it must be regarded not as history so much as "interpretation": the "interpretation," of course, being open to the usual criticism. They would have us confine ourselves entirely to the first three Gospels. Accepting for a moment the limitation, do the synoptic Gospels set forth any claim of our Lord which can fairly be regarded as a claim of Divine nature and relation such as the Church predicates of Him? It is a question of fact that is before us. It is admitted that our Lord, who appeared at the apex of Jewish history and who, humanly, was in the line of David, claimed to be the Jewish Messiah. His theme was the kingdom of God and He claimed to be the King. At first the claim was not openly made to the world. When the moment was ripe, our Lord elicited from the disciples, whom He had trained, their belief in His claim. It was "revealed" to them gradually. When they at length knew, they were bidden to guard silence concerning it (Mark 8: 30).

At the end He made a public claim of Messiahship. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem was deliberate. It was His challenge to the

nation to receive Him. As Harnack avows, "it could mean only one thing." Why then did they not receive Him? There was a moment when they wished "by force to make him king." And if He had been a king, a Messiah, such as they expected—a political personage who would deliver them from Roman tyranny they would have received Him with acclamation. *But it was His divine claim that stood in the way.* He was a Messiah of another order and they did not want Him. *It is not possible fairly to isolate* the tragic event of Calvary from his previous teaching and claims. The High Priest understood what it meant. Our Lord was condemned for "blasphemy"—for a divine claim. Here again it is not a question of "proof texts" so much as something that is shot into the warp and woof of His teaching and attitude.

Confining ourselves to the synoptic Gospels for the moment, our Lord claimed the complete allegiance of men, declaring that denial of Him involved denial of God (Matt. 10: 32-33). He spoke of Himself as the "fulfiller" of the law (Matt. 5: 7). In His own name He forgave sins. His words, He said, were final and should never pass away (Matt. 24; 25). Those who built upon them would become stable; others would perish (Matt.

7: 24-27). He claimed to be the supreme judge of men (Matt. 13: 41; 16: 4; 25: 31). He is the standard for man's life: He alone can appraise the actions of a man's life. He promised His perpetual presence to groups of men who meet in His Name (Matt. 18: 19-20), and to the Church at large (Matt. 18: 16–20). He claimed to know God as none other and to be the sole authentic revealer of the Father (Matt. 11: 25–27). This great passage, admitted by Renan to be genuine and sublime, is stressed by Harnack who says it is clear "that He named Himself *alone* as Son of God."

He came to make men *real* sons of God and He claimed to know the Father uniquely, yet He always distinguished between His own Sonship and that of others. It was "my Father" and "your Father." Never did He say, including Himself, "*our Father.*" This is an astonishing thing. In the parable of the wicked husbandmen, he clearly distinguishes between the "Servants," and the "Son" (Himself). He places Himself in a category quite different from any other of God's messengers to mankind. Months before Gethsemane loomed in view, He spoke privately to His disciples about His death as "a ransom for many," and of His resurrection "on the third

day." His chosen name for Himself was "the Son of Man," a term expressing more than the official title of the Messiah and indicating His especial relationship to the whole of humanity. The universal note of His teaching—"unto all the world"— indicated the relation of His person to the entire race of man. This Christ who made so prodigious a claim gathered to Himself disciples many of whom beheld Him in the intimacy of private life. And they believed Him to be the Son of God and they died for their faith.

Moreover, Jesus believed that He had a future. The world saw in Him only a carpenter turned prophet, but He Himself said, "You shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake." Does the world remember any other peasant teacher who dared to say that his disciples would attract the attention of kings and governors *for his sake?* Yet Jesus did this and His words have been fulfilled. He said He would build His Church and the gates of hell should not prevail against it. The date of the first Gospel is entirely immaterial to the question of the truth of this prediction. It has been royally fulfilled and, humanly speaking, there was nothing less likely than that it should be.

The things we have thus rapidly reviewed

belong to the first three Gospels of which Rationalism admits in part the value. But what of the fourth, that of John? Here, from the prologue to the epilogue, every line breathes the Divinity of Jesus Christ. Suppose it be true that in this Gospel there is both history and "interpretation"; the real question remains to be answered, is that interpretation true? *And it must be answered in the light of the whole Christian history.* If the language and the style of the fourth Gospel differ from that of the synoptic Gospels, *does the thought?* Is there anything in the fourth Gospel that reaches a greater altitude than the tremendous words of St. Matthew 11: 25–30, of which even M. Renan admits the genuineness? And what shall we say of the great prayer of St. John 17? That prayer alone separates Jesus from other men forever. Let us look at it since it is the only full length prayer of our Lord recorded in the Gospels.

When a man speaks to God in prayer he reveals the depths of his soul. How then does Jesus speak to God? It is impossible to doubt that He really uttered this prayer. Can we conceive of anybody inventing it and putting it into His mouth? It must be genuine if there is anything genuine at all. But regard the solemn implications and revelations of this

wondrous prayer! "This is life eternal," says Jesus to the Father, "that they should know thee, the only true God and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ"—not God only, but God and Christ. The Father and the Son are placed together in that prayer. Here is no rhetorical effect but the heart-breathing of the soul in prayer to God. "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory I had with thee before the world was." What can we say to a revelation like that? What is the key that can unlock it but this that we are using? Again: "And all things that are mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them." What can unlock that mystery? And finally, "Father, that which thou hast given me, I will that where I am, they also may be with me; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." If prayers are the revelation of soul reality, what revelation does this prayer offer of the personality of Jesus?

How, then, shall we account for Jesus Christ? He is either the product of time or the product of eternity. He is certainly not the product of time. It is common for some to say that He represented the highest work of human evolution. But if Jesus Christ is the

product of evolution, how is it that evolution has not produced a person higher than Jesus Christ? Theodore Parker admitted "that Jesus Christ is the greatest Person who has appeared upon this planet until the present," but he added, "we may not therefore say there will never be a greater than He produced." But one equally great replied, "In Christ humanity has reached its highest conceivable limit. Beyond Him it is impossible to think of human elevation."

In the light of the history of two thousand years which of the two has the advantage of the prophet? We can only adequately account for Him as the Church has done from the very first. The Divinity of Jesus Christ alone explains the facts concerning Him. It is the one key that unlocks the mystery of His life, and it is the only truth that satisfies us. What do we human beings need? Union with God; a centre, a summit, an ideal for our race. In the God-man we possess our summit, our centre, our ideal. And the only ideal that has ever satisfied man, or ever can satisfy him, is Jesus as the New Testament reveals Him. The Divinity of Jesus Christ is the one resplendent star, shining in the darkness of the night, the pole-star by which we can steer our frail boat with the certainty that we shall reach the

harbour. The truth of the Divinity of Jesus Christ is admirable for the intellect, adorable for the heart, and redemptive for the life. To say that Jesus is of the value of God for us involves many metaphysical questions which we cannot here and now touch. We need not be afraid of these. We may never be able to solve them. But to say that because they are difficult we must needs fall back upon an earthly humanity of Jesus is not courageous. The facts demand more, even the full faith of the Church. And we must stay with Dr. Dale—"He whom I obey as the supreme authority over my life; He whom I trust for the pardon of my sins; He to whose final judgment I look—He—*by whatever name I may call Him*—is my God."

"If Jesus Christ is a man,—
And only a man,—I say
That of all mankind I cleave to Him,
And to Him will I cleave alway.

If Jesus Christ is a God,—
And the only God,—I swear
I will follow Him through Heaven and Hell,
The earth, the sea and the air!"

V

"THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH"

THE problem of God in relation to the life of man's sin, his suffering, his salvation, his need, his aspirations and his survival of the shock of death, is at once the oldest, the newest, the most tormenting and the most welcome of all problems. There is nothing so pressing as this, for everything depends upon our vital and harmonious relation to the Being who has produced us and for whose purposes we have been brought into being. God has "made us for Himself," said St. Augustine, "and our hearts are unquiet until they rest in Him."

But how shall we know Him? Men have sought Him by the way of reason and of philosophy and they have found *some* kind of God: a "Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness"; "an infinite and eternal substance from which all things proceed"; a Law, an Order, a Mind. But nobody ever found the true and living God *the Father* in these ways. Philosophy and pure reason give us an abstraction,—a cold and remote Deity—a universally

diffused spirit with which there can be no warm human communion. Wherever God has been truly known it has always been by the way of revelation. He never "left himself without witness," St. Paul told the pagans of Lystra, but that revelation has been progressive and disclosed in the natural order of the world, in the human conscience, in the judgment upon nations and particularly in the life and development of one people Israel. To the fathers God spake "in many forms and fashions" (Heb. 1: 1; Moffat). Once for all He has spoken in His Son the final word to man; in this way He has crowned the unfolding revelation of His character. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." *Such is the Christian faith.* And its implication is that in Christ man really sees what God is like, *so far as man needs to know Him.* Christ perfectly reveals Him. In Rome a mirror conveniently placed upon a table reflects perfectly a masterpiece of Michael Angelo painted upon the ceiling. Visitors no longer stretch their necks to behold the painting above them, they can behold it at their ease. Jesus brought God to our very door, He was the mirror of God. He that hath seen Him hath seen the Father.

There is more than this, however. Jesus came not only to reveal God to men; He came,

savingly, to bring us to God. "For us men and our salvation he came down from heaven." "He suffered for sins once for all that he might bring us to God." The Incarnation therefore is the central truth of Christianity. Had there been no crib there would have been no cross and no earthly life, no decisive and authoritative teaching, no culminating sacrifice. The life and work of Jesus are meaningless apart from the central faith of the Incarnation. If it falls, all else falls with it. If it be true everything else is explained. The Christian Church believes that our Lord was preëxistent and "came down from heaven" for man's redemption. This belief, of course, carries with it tremendous implications, which we must face. We are bound to ask if it is true and what it involves for human life.

The first thing we have to do is to put ourselves at the proper point of view for the understanding of this truth. How came it to pass that such an extraordinary doctrine as this ever came into existence, and possessed the intellect, the conscience and the heart of the Christian Church? Let us understand clearly that it did not begin as a theory to which certain facts were fitted—that is, the apostles did not start with this as an hypothesis to explain a prejudiced theology. The origin of Jesus, it must

be remembered, was hidden from His relatives, hidden from the people of Nazareth where He was brought up, hidden from His own disciples for the first two years of His ministry. Let us try and place ourselves in imagination, at the point of time and space where Jesus first met His disciples. What was it that drew them to Him? It was no dogma of His Divinity; no doctrine of His Incarnation; they came to Him because they could not help it. He said to them, "Follow me," and, yielding to the magnetism of His unique personality, they followed Him; but they did not *then* know all that He was. To them, at that time, He was merely a great Rabbi, an unique teacher, who spake as man had never spoken, and they could not resist Him. They accepted Him as the leader of a new movement, His personality constituting its central authority. It was not until Jesus had been with them for two years that He put the decisive question: "Whom do you say I am?" They took Him at first for what He was, not understanding the mystery of His person at all.

We must further understand that the doctrine of the Incarnation arose amongst a people to whom the very idea was foreign. The Jews were monotheists who had no idea whatever of an incarnation of their God. The pagans had

gods galore in the shape of men. There were plenty of "incarnations" of a kind in the pagan world, as every student knows. But we repeat the Jews themselves did not possess the idea, yet the doctrine of the Incarnation arose amongst these monotheistic people. We must face that fact. The disciples were, at first, Unitarians; they were not Trinitarians in any sense until Jesus came; then they were compelled by the necessities of the case to revise their Jewish belief and to become Trinitarian Christians. They encountered the mighty person of the Lord Christ. They saw His uniqueness; they beheld His mighty works. They saw Him crucified and buried, yet on the third day they saw Him alive again. They had "many infallible proofs" of all this, as St. Luke puts it. When finally He ceased to be seen of their mortal eyes, they experienced afresh His mighty power at Pentecost and onward. His Spirit descended, transforming them and fusing the units of the apostolic band into one common life.

He had promised to send them His Spirit and He kept His word. They knew through their spiritual experience that He was alive and at work on the other side of the veil. The experience grew and deepened. Through Him they came to know the Father—really know

Him. And then it was that the Holy Spirit led them into the further truth concerning Jesus—they came to see who He was. The *fact* of the Incarnation had been present to them from the beginning: now it was formulated into a faith. "It was the necessary way of accounting for Jesus Christ." The fact of Christ before and after the resurrection compelled faith in the Incarnation: it was their intellectual and moral response to the revelation of God in the life of Christ.

Another important thing to remember is that the doctrine of the Incarnation *arose early*. It is one of the earliest Christian truths. The early letters of St. Paul contain it. To the Corinthians St. Paul wrote: "He was rich yet for your sakes he became poor" (2 Cor. 8: 9). The statement is not made in the way of dogmatic teaching: the apostle is employing a fundamental Christian fact for an ethical purpose: as a moral dynamic, in fact. It was "the grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ" which led Him to stoop. "He *was* rich, he *became* poor." The later and fuller statement of the truth of the Incarnation is here in substance. In an even earlier letter St. Paul refers to our Lord as "the second man, the Lord from heaven." He introduces it, as it were, incidentally and not in a dogmatic manner. It is

natural to him so to speak of Jesus. We cannot explain away creative words like these. They are evidence—out of much more—that quite early in the Church the Incarnation was an article of faith. The rationalistic theory that the dogma of the Incarnation was legendary and slowly grew is at total variance with the facts. Here, before the year 60 A. D., it existed in substantial form.

There was no time for legendary growth. Legends do not spring up in twenty years, and never under the eyes of the generation which knew the living actors of the undoubted history. Besides, the form of the statements in the Pauline writings are entirely removed from the form which legend usually takes.

There are other documents, however, with which we have to reckon. The Epistle to the Philippians was written in the year 59–60 A. D. In the second chapter of this epistle the doctrine of the Incarnation is fully developed. "Have this mind in you, which was also in Jesus Christ: who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient, even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." Or in the still

more vivid words of Weymouth's version: "Let the same disposition be in you which was in Jesus Christ. Although from the beginning He had the nature of God, He did not reckon His equality with God a treasure to be tightly grasped. Nay, He stripped Himself of His glory, and took on Him the nature of a bond servant by becoming a man [we are *born* men; He *became* one] like other men. And being recognized as truly human, He humbled Himself, and even stooped to die, yea, to die on a cross." In another of the early writings of the New Testament, the Epistle to the Galatians, occurs the sentence (Chapter 4: 4): "When the fulness of the time was come, *God sent forth his Son,* born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them which were under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons."

When these earlier writings are duly analyzed they yield the following result: The early Church believed that Jesus Christ was "originally in the form and nature of God." Equality with God was His by right. He did not consider it a "prize" to be grasped at. But in becoming incarnate "He emptied himself"—or, "He stripped himself of his glory." Whatever the self-emptying meant, *it was His own act:* that is the important point to grasp.

He had the right and the power to do it. Further He entered into human conditions at a definite point in time. He came across the barrier that divides us from the invisible world and entered fully into human conditions. He appeared at the appointed moment "in the fulness of time," when the purposes of God were ripe for His manifestation. There was no accident about His appearance; there was, on the contrary, a definite plan and order in it. The purpose of His coming was to redeem men, to bring them to their full sonship. Such is the earliest full dress doctrine of the Incarnation as given in the earliest writings of the New Testament which are dated before the year 60 A. D.

It does not seem to be reasonable, therefore, to deny the fact that, according to our documents, the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation in its main outline was firmly established within thirty years of the Crucifixion. But this, of course, in itself offers no proof of the *truth* of that doctrine. We must therefore go on to ask whether the Incarnation such as Christianity sets it forth is possible, is it true to the nature of things: is it true to fact?

Within so limited a space it is not possible to deal adequately with the many implications of this truth in metaphysical and psychological

directions. We must keep to the main question. To the "catholic" doctrine of the Incarnation two main objections have been offered: the greatness of God and the insignificance of man. How can the Infinite become the finite? we are asked. How is it possible to conceive of the Eternal God visiting one of the small planets and becoming man in order to redeem our pigmy race? And does it not mean that His dwelling here withdraws Him from the rest of creation? To argue thus is to misconceive the entire thing.

The thought of God's greatness is an old thought, and is often expressed in the Old Testament; yet it was not an obstacle to a further conception—*i. e.*, "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity, I dwell with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." And again: "Will God dwell with men upon the earth?" But "greatness" is not the greatest thing in God. The greatest thing in Him is love. The greatness of God must not be set over against the littleness of man: it is rather the Fatherhood of God that calls in the immensity of its love for the loving homage of His earthly children and *it is that love in Christ* which recreates the lost sonship.

God is love. Love can stoop. That is its great power, its great distinction. But love

goes further; it is bound to communicate itself.

Wherever there is love there is self-propagation, self-communication. Condescension is the virtue of the great; aloofness is the folly of the small. The greater a man is, the more he can stoop; the smaller a man is, the less is he capable of doing so. In human society we find it is the great man who stoops. If then with our imperfections this is true of humanity may we not apply the principles of elimination and of eminence to God, and say that the very greatness of God, who is love, so far from preventing Him stooping, commits Him to the supreme act of condescension? We are not crushed by the thought of God's greatness now that we know Him, as revealed in Jesus Christ. We are able to believe in His condescension because of Jesus Christ. The greatness of God, then, so far from being a reason against the Incarnation, is an urgent reason in its favour.

What shall we say of the second objection—that of the insignificance of man? When we remember the almost illimitable universe of which we are part, and then reflect upon the small part that man plays in it, it seems reasonable at first to believe that man is far too insignificant to be the object of such an event as the Incarnation. But just as we should

object to the common idea of God's greatness, so should we also object to the common idea of man's insignificance. It is quite a false assumption that man's rank in nature is determined by his situation in space.

Man's greatness consists in his kinship with God and in his potentialities as a redeemed being in Christ. That forms for us the nexus of the Incarnation. God is great by love; we are great in virtue of our likeness to Him. And those two things show us not the impossibility, but the possibility and even the necessity of an Incarnation. The smallness of our planet has nothing whatever to do with the reality of the great redemptive work Christ came to accomplish. Our planet is man's home and it is fitting that in the place of his sin the restoration should be given. It is a pity when men confound *size* with *greatness,* as do they who imagine that the smallness of our planet makes the Incarnation incredible.

It is an entirely irrelevant question whether other planets are inhabited or not and whether the Incarnation applies to them; what matters is this—that *we* are sick and need a cure and that the one medicine for our sickness is found in Christ. If there are beings on other planets who have sinned and need redemption the love of God is quite equal to dealing with them.

But so far as we are concerned we have to deal with the fact which has materialized under our own eyes. God has been really manifested in Jesus Christ upon our earth—that is the fact for us—and in that fact He has revealed God to man and man to himself.

Jesus was not another specimen of our spoiled humanity, He was a revelation of the true type after which we were created. "The head of every man is Christ." But He brought not only revelation but redemption and dynamic. As He brought God to man, He brings man to God, by His one sacrifice and by the continued working of His Spirit. And the truth of it all is shown in Christian experience. Through Christ we really know God and become one with Him. Jesus is "of the value" of God to us and if we reject that value then we have no God at all of whom we can be certain, and who alone can satisfy our hearts.

The more the matter is considered the more will it become clear that the alternative is either the Christian truth of the Incarnation or a series of hypotheses concerning God which can neither content the reason, satisfy the heart, nor save from sin. For all these hypotheses run down sooner or later into pantheism, and pantheism, despite its intellectual charm for some, does, as a simple matter of fact, act as

an acid upon the heart, slowly but surely destroying the inner fibre. As a theory it is nebulous: as a moral force it is hopeless. The proof of this is written large in history. Pantheism in any of its forms dissipates God, making of Him nothing more than a living atmosphere through which we thrust our hands, but with which we can never commune. The Incarnation, on the contrary, brings God to our very door. He touches both our senses and our spirits. It definitely reveals His personality and shows Him, in Christ, as caring for the single soul. And this is what men want to know;—whether, or not, God cares for the individual. The future will not and cannot be with the pantheistic creed in any of its forms—it is impossible. The future belongs to the faith which has at its heart the confession—"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself."

VI

"BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY"

WE have now to embark upon an exceedingly delicate study which it is not possible to avoid, if we would be true to the story of the Gospels, to the universal belief of the Church, *and to ourselves.* The Incarnation of our Lord is set forth in the New Testament, unvaryingly as the act of God by which He, in the person of Jesus Christ, entered into humanity to redeem it. He "came down from heaven," as the creed puts it. He did not spring from the earth as we do, but He was the divine messenger "sent" by the Father from the other side. Now it is clear that if this be so, we are in the presence, not of an entirely new beginning, as is the case with all human beings born upon this planet, but of a *transition* from one state to another. If Jesus Christ existed before Bethlehem; if He is the "Lord from heaven"; if He "was rich and became poor" for our sakes, then in what way did He cross the border and reach us? How was the transition effected? The answer

of the Christian Church for nearly two thousand years has been "He was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary." There was the human mother, but not the human father.

Now it is well known that in our time there is widespread hesitation about accepting this part of the Church's creed, and that not amongst coarse-grained people to whom the most delicate story in the world would occasion an outburst of gross jesting, but also amongst earnest people who are prepared to fight to the last ditch for their Christian faith. These cannot be treated with contumely: we must listen to them and then see if there be not some way of understanding.

Some men, of course, reject the miraculous *in toto*. They do so in the name of a "science," which has nothing whatever to support them, and which they have no right to invoke. They have made up their minds that nature is an enclosed system, that its "laws" are irrevocably fixed, that God is a prisoner in His own universe and that there is no room whatever for the free play of the Divine Will. Such an attitude has nothing to support it, either in science or philosophy. It is not warranted by our slender knowledge of the universe, nor by our experience of the action of God in human history. It is not with this class

of persons that we are at present concerned, but rather with that class which professes that the story of the virgin birth of our Lord "complicates" our Christian faith.

It is thought to be an "encumbrance." "The Divinity of our Lord," they say, "is not bound up with His human origin," and it is a serious thing to stake everything upon a story which has so slender a foundation. In passing it may be remarked that from one point of view it is quite possible to treat the two things separately. And in this view, the Divinity of our Lord does *not* depend upon the truth or otherwise of the miraculous birth stories. His deity would be just as resplendent apart from any narrative of His entry into the world. The Church does not believe Him to be Divine because of the story of the Virgin Birth: it believes the story of the Virgin Birth because it so admirably fits in with what we know Jesus Christ to have been and to be. But this is to anticipate.

On what grounds is the Virgin Birth challenged? Mainly, four: First, it is said, truly of course, that the story is found in only two of the Gospels and nowhere else in the New Testament. Second, it is pointed out that in the Orient it was not uncommon to transfigure after their death, the births of great men, cast-

ing the glamour and the glory of their later life upon the gray sky which heralded their dawn. We are also told that there are virgin birth stories in other religions. The suggestion therefore is that the Gospel story of our Lord's birth belongs to this order and it is therefore legendary. Third, the silence of the Epistles concerning this great event is regarded as evidence that it was not known in the primitive Church, or if it was, that it was not an article of faith. Finally, of course, it is miraculous, and as Matthew Arnold said with his air of finality, "miracles do not happen." These are the chief grounds upon which the Bible story is doubted or denied. Let us examine them carefully.

The fact is admitted that in only two of the Gospels is there a narrative of our Lord's miraculous birth. But it is significant that these are the only two Gospels which mention His birth at all and in each of them the Virgin Birth is recorded as the means by which He entered our world. Neither Mark nor John deal with our Lord's earlier years at all. Both of them commence their narratives with the story of the opening of His public ministry. But is it reasonable to say that because these two evangelists never mention the early years of our Lord's life, *there were no early years?*

Yet if the argument derived from the silence of these writers were pressed to its legitimate conclusion, this is where we should be landed. It is quite gratuitous to assume that the writer of the earliest Gospel (Mark) and the writer of the latest (John) knew nothing whatever of the story of the Virgin Birth. How can any man say that? It was not the purpose of St. Mark to record anything whatever of the early years of our Lord's life. But it is noticeable that when he begins to write he instantly strikes a key-note which perfectly harmonizes with the miraculous in the person of Christ, "the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

So also there are implications in the Fourth Gospel which harmonize completely with the stories in Matthew and Luke, although the actual story of the birth of Christ is never referred to. So, also, is it with regard to the silence of the Epistles. If it be pressed that there was no miraculous birth of Christ because none is recorded in the Epistles, the reply again would be that the Epistles never mention any details of our Lord's human life; shall we therefore argue that there was *no* human life lived in Galilee and Judea? The argument from silence therefore is an inconsequence—we can rule it out.

But coming to the two positive narratives that we possess of our Lord's birth, how are we to account for them if they are not genuine? There is absolutely no warrant on "critical" grounds for rejecting them as interpolations, or late additions to an original and simpler story. Whoever rejects them does so on quite other than literary grounds. It must be remembered further that one of the writers who tells the story was a doctor—"Luke the beloved physician,"—who opens his narrative of the life of Christ by saying that he had "traced the course of all things accurately from the first." On what ground of sane literary criticism then has any the right to say that the stories thus introduced must necessarily be untrue or legendary? There is another consideration. The historicity of St. Luke is now unchallenged. Harnack has made clear, once and for all, that fact. But this carries with it important implications. Most of Luke's writing was completed before Paul's martyrdom—as a careful examination of his two books shows. St. Paul died in the late sixties. This means that the birth stories were in circulation and accepted by the Church *during the lifetime of the first generation of people who knew and followed Jesus.* They were not introduced in a later age. The stories in the two Gospels differ

from each other: they are quite independent, and they are *complementary* and not contradictory as is sometimes supposed.

Those who are troubled about the supposed "legendary" character of the narratives would be soon reassured were they carefully to contrast the New Testament story with the legends they are supposed to resemble. There is nothing whatever in common between these grotesque inventions and the sweet story of the Gospels. Legends gathered around the birth of the Buddha, and the pagan world had many similar stories. But *what* stories they were, of lustful gods engendering a divine progeny: of trees bending before the miraculous infant, of milk exuding from the ground, of the sun veiling its face and the moon becoming bright as the sun. Had the New Testament writers desired to introduce legend into their stories they had a mass of material upon which to draw, as the apocryphal writings show. But the fact that they rejected it is evidence that they were not romanticists but historians.

The Gospel story of the birth of Christ is distinguished for its wonderful reserve, its delicacy and reverence. "The whole story is as pure as the mountain air," says Dr. Fairbairn. There is nothing whatever of the atmosphere of legend about it. It has to be remembered also

that the history belongs to Jewish soil, upon which pagan myths were never allowed to flourish. The monotheistic Jew, become Christian, would never suffer himself to be defiled by the abominable stories of pagan mythology which with all his heart he loathed.

It is time, however, that we passed to the positive side of the matter. If only two Gospels actually record the miraculous birth of our Lord, the rest of the New Testament presupposes and demands it. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us!" So deep a statement as that demands something exceptional in the coming of Jesus. So does the great statement of Paul that "He was in the form of God and took the form of a servant and emptied himself." The Virgin Birth at least harmonizes with these statements. If our Lord was really preëxistent, in what other way could He have entered the world? The mode of our coming into life is known to all of us. We begin life for the first time at the moment of our human generation. But when He came He did not begin life for the first time. If He was preëxistent He must have crossed the barrier into human conditions: if He was not preëxistent, how in any true sense can we speak of an incarnation at all? And what authority is Jesus Christ to us if He did not, as He said

He did, come to this earth from that heavenly world?

"We cannot," says Dr. Peake, "discuss the question in a vacuum. Were we treating the case of some ordinary man for whom this claim was put forward, we might excusably put it aside on the ground of the inherent improbability of the event. But, in this case, we are speaking of One whom we regard as the Son of God, and we may feel that *in a person so supernatural the Virgin Birth was natural. The very character of the narrative pleads in its favour.*" This is admirably said. The Virgin Birth *is* fitting: it fits Christ, it harmonizes exactly with Him. The Virgin Birth guarantees the continuity of His life, He is the same Christ here as there: He simply passed through a narrow channel to His life upon earth. Further, as Dr. Gore puts it, "the Virgin Birth fits in with His universal impersonality." He belongs to humanity. He is neither Jew nor Greek nor Roman—He is the Son of Man. With the elimination of the human father, the national mark, provincial and restricted, disappears. Jesus belongs to all—that is the miracle. It is not as Jew that He is ours, both Lord and Redeemer, but as the Son of God and the Son of Man, going beyond all human limitations. He is omni-

personal and not the particular possession of any nation.

Moreover, the Virgin Birth meant a break with sinful heredity. Our Lord took flesh from His mother only. He was not handicapped from the beginning as we are. He came with both hands free to raise us and to redeem us. "He is not," as Dr. Liddon says, "less truly representative of our race because in Him it has recovered its perfection."

There is therefore no valid *reason* for disbelieving or doubting the story of the Virgin Birth. There may be prejudice but this is not reason. There is on the contrary every reason to believe it if we believe in Christ at all. The two birth stories complement each other. In Matthew, Joseph's side is stated. All Joseph's perplexities are set forth. In Luke, Mary's side is given. He tells us that Mary "pondered these things in her heart" and kept silence concerning them. We can understand that the time had not arrived to speak of the sacred mystery. Joseph, before his death, told *his* story, and Mary, in due time, told hers. Luke inspired by the Holy Spirit gave it to a Church *that already believed in our Lord's Divinity* on other grounds. It is a fitting account of the manner in which Divine love be-

came bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, for our salvation.

There is a great deal then to be said for the dogma of the Virgin Birth. It is not wise to brush it aside with a mere gesture of impatience, as if it were unworthy of consideration. Difficulties there may be, and are, in believing any story that involves an exceptional action on the part of God. But is any man entitled in virtue of the limited knowledge we possess of the "laws" of the Universe to say that nothing can happen which lies outside the system of thought we have constructed? It was Mr. Huxley, by no means an orthodox believer, who warned us against the "conceit" of imagining that our exceedingly limited knowledge of the laws of nature gave us the right to pronounce dogmatically upon all questions in heaven and earth. Biologically the Virgin Birth of our Lord may be encompassed with mystery, but is that sufficient ground for rejecting it? The question we ought to consider is whether or not it fits in naturally with all that we know of Jesus. And can there be any doubt what the plain answer should be?

The Incarnation was a revelation of God. "In inorganic life God has revealed His wisdom and power; in organic life He has revealed His life; in human life He has revealed His

heart." But who, to look at man as he is today, would imagine him to be a revelation of God? What kind of God is He who is reflected in man? We evidently need a truer revelation of God than man, as we know him, has given.

What this world needed was not the revelation of a new specimen of our spoiled type, but a revelation of the type itself. And in Jesus Chirst we have, not another specimen of an imperfect or marred race, but the perfect and pure type after which we were created. We rejoice in the Incarnation because in Jesus Christ we have a complete revelation of God and of man. Man cries out for God. "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" Jesus Christ alone completely answers that cry.

If Jesus Christ be not the Incarnate One, then our situation is this: we are the victims of a gigantic illusion and of God we know nothing, and can know nothing that the human heart really needs to know. But Christian experience witnesses to the reality of the knowledge of God in Christ. Through Him we really know God. Jesus has not displaced God for us. He has made Him the more real. Christian people rejoice in the Divine light that reaches them through Christ. It is the one light upon our life. When that light is re-

fused there remains nothing but darkness. God disappears; Heaven is closed; destiny is uncertain. But, with Jesus Christ, all is light and love; all is certain, and life receives its coronation.

VII

"HE ROSE AGAIN THE THIRD DAY FROM THE DEAD"

CHRISTIANITY, we have said, is the only serious great religion which is vitally bound up with a single Person. The religions created by men known to history are only partially dependent upon their founders. The name of Mohammed follows that of God in the Mussulman confession of faith. The value of Mohammed to Islam is that he is deemed to be the "prophet of God." Behind Mohammedanism, also, stands the Koran, a book which, it is claimed, came direct from God and which may not be translated. Mohammedanism, therefore, is only in a secondary way dependent upon the erstwhile Arabian muleteer. It is not so with Christianity. That depends entirely upon Christ. If He is false, it is false. Christianity stands or falls with Him.

The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is the keystone of the arch of our Christian faith. Everything depends upon it; it is for us a fact, not for speculation, but a fact for life. It is

the foundation supporting our edifice; the title deeds guarding our estate. The seriousness of it is set forth by Paul in his well-known words: "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." Now, one of two things: either the doctrine of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the profoundest fact of life, carrying with it the farthest reaching consequences, or it is the greatest impiety joined to the strangest of follies. In every age this fundamental Christian belief has been attacked. In our own time the opposition is particularly keen and bitter.

Time was when the opposition took the form of vulgar derision, and laughter did duty for reason. That phase has entirely passed away—save for an exception here and there. Educated people no longer make sport of any serious religious belief whether they agree with it or not. The new thing, in our time, is the attempt to explain or to spiritualize the Resurrection of Jesus on quite natural grounds, and so to separate the Christ from all with which the Church has associated Him during two millenniums.

The miracle is frankly denied, but it is thought that, while denying the miracle, it is possible to retain an attenuated belief in the resurrection; to guard its ethics while banishing

the fact. It is sufficient, says M. Loisy, "that we salute Jesus as alive, without reference to the method of His rising. Our faith is in the immortal life of Jesus." Professor Harnack distinguishes between what he calls the "Easter message and the Easter faith." We may hold the one, and deny the other. The denial is made, no doubt honestly, in what is supposed to be the interests of a pure spiritual religion. "We may surely believe Jesus to be alive without committing ourselves to the story as narrated in the Gospels. The account of a literal bodily resurrection is an incubus to faith. "All men rise"—so the slogan proceeds, "in that their spirits survive that shock of physical dissolution we call death. Jesus rose in that sense, as we all do, but the story of a miraculous rising from the dead is no longer credible."

Now, this will not do. It is altogether too easy a way of avoiding what all must recognize to be a difficulty of reconciling fact with fact, although the difficulty is not at all so great as some imagine. The Resurrection of our Lord is not a question of *a* man passing, in an exceptional way into the spirit world: it is a question of this *particular* Man, who, by general admission, stands apart from other men, resuming a life which was natural to Him, in a

way that is quite unusual for common folk. An unusual Person exhibiting an unusual Power—*that* is the problem we have to face, since it is the situation which the Gospels, with uninterrupted consistency, set before us. More than this, a suggested "spiritualizing" of the story with the purpose of avoiding the physical or psychical miracle to which the Gospels bear witness, omits the main element in the case and that element is the Person of Christ Himself. We cannot treat the story of the resurrection *in vacuo:* that is to say as detached from the general Person of Christ, with His unmistakable character and His remarkable claims. Faith in a spiritual or a poetic resurrection is not what the Church is built upon. If such a faith could be firmly established upon a historic foundation then all history would have to be rewritten in terms of a gigantic hallucination.

When announcing the tragedy of His crucifixion to His disciples, our Lord said: "The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles and be crucified, and be raised the third day." Now, if He only intended a spiritual resurrection why the introduction of that phrase "the third day"? It is a meaningless phrase. When the spirit "rises," it rises at once; it does not wait until the third

day. If, however, He did not mean His bodily resurrection, then it was utterly superfluous to add the words "the third day." It is a mere begging of the question to try and spiritualize the story. We have to face it frankly. Is it true or not? Did Jesus, or did He not, rise from the dead on the third day, as He predicted?

In approaching the subject honesty demands that we should lay aside all prejudice both on the side of belief and of unbelief. There are many Christian people who refuse to reason about the matter; they are content to say that they "feel" the story must be true. That, of course, is a poor position to assume. A man may "feel" that a thing is true in his personal experience, but no one can "feel" that an historic fact is true. An historic fact does not depend upon our feeling; it lies outside ourselves, and it has to be considered quite apart from any sentiment or feeling. On the other side all prejudice of unbelief should be abandoned, such as that which says, "miracles do not happen, therefore this never happened," or with a celebrated sceptic, "No amount of *evidence* would ever make me believe that a dead man rose again to life." When a man starts out with a mind hermetically sealed against unwelcome "evidence," and who in

advance forecloses the question by saying he absolutely refuses to consider it, what place is there for reason? We lay aside, then, all prejudice of belief or unbelief and consider the matter *de novo.*

Let us adopt the scientific method, pure and simple; that is to say, instead of beginning with hypotheses, let us begin with those absolute facts which nobody dreams of doubting. We begin, then, with five incontrovertible facts. The first is that on Friday, at three o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus really died upon the Cross. Can there be two opinions about that? Preceding His death and hastening it were the bloody sweat in Gethsemane, the long agony through the night, the flagellation under Pontius Pilate, the nailing of the Sacred Flesh to the wood of the Cross, the crucifixion under the burning heat of the sun, and the piercing of the side with the lance of the Roman soldier. Following His death was the certificate given by the Roman officials that the Person taken down from the Cross was really dead. Surely everybody will admit that Jesus Christ really died. The second fact is this: His dead body was entombed and guarded by a company of Roman soldiers. It was in the grave during the whole of Friday night and the whole of Saturday. At daybreak on Sunday morning

His body was *not* there. And that body has never been found. No person ever set eyes upon it apart from those who alleged they beheld it in a resurrection state on Easter Day and for forty days after.

The third fact is that of the general scepticism of the apostles and disciples. It is sometimes gratuitously affirmed that the apostles were predisposed to believe in the Resurrection; their training and temperament led them to accept any miracle upon the slightest pretext. But what ground is there for this opinion? Do we find from the only records available that the apostles were predisposed to believe in the Resurrection? On the contrary, we see that all of them were confirmed sceptics. When Mary of Magdala saw Jesus, she did not know Him; she mistook Him for the gardener. When the women told the apostles they had seen the Lord, "their words seemed unto them as idle tales, and they believed them not" (Luke 24: 11). Thomas, on the evening of Easter Day, when told that Jesus was risen from the dead and had appeared to the eleven, flatly refused to believe the story. Does that look like a predisposition to believe? The scepticism amongst the disciples and apostles was universal; none of them believed the story of the Resurrection at first. So far from be-

lieving it, they regarded their cause as lost and some of them were actually on their way home when the reality of the Resurrection was brought home to them and their whole outlook was changed. It is grossly unfair to the facts as they are reported for us to pretend that the apostles were "susceptible" to the suggestion that their Master was risen. The evidence is all in the opposite direction.

The fourth fact is the sudden general belief in the Resurrection. In one hour, these sceptics, who refused to accept the story told by the women who had been to the sepulchre, believed that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. They believed that He appeared five times on Easter Day, and at various times during a period of forty days. Five hundred of them, Paul says, saw Him at one time, on a mountain-top, in the full light of day. Within six weeks of Christ's death, in the very city where He was crucified, these men were publicly telling their story. In one day three thousand people believed it, and joined the Christian Society. In the very city where the crucifixion took place, the Church was created and built upon the truth of the resurrection.

But the fifth and last fact is the most striking of all—*i. e.*, the transformation of the disciples. There was a threefold transformation, of be-

lief, of character, and of social life. First, there was a transformation of belief. The apostles and disciples were, on Friday, monotheists—worshippers of one God only; but on and after Easter Day, and from that day to this, they, and their successors, have been worshippers of Jesus Christ, whose worship, however, has not displaced but rather enlarged the worship of God. The Cross, which to them had been a symbol of disgrace, became from that moment a symbol of victory. The Church has planted the Cross in the highest places of the earth. It is her symbol of victory. More marvellous still: of all Jewish institutions, the one to which they held most tenaciously was the Sabbath day—the seventh day of the week.

Yet these people changed their Sabbath from the last to the first day of the week. Why did they change it? It was in honour of the man whom they declared had risen from the dead. The more this matter is considered the more amazing it becomes. But a more remarkable transformation was that of their characters. What were they before the Resurrection? Men of low condition; persons who were self-seeking and often cowardly. But see them after the Resurrection. Look at the chief of the party. Before the Resurrection Simon Peter denied with oaths and curses that he knew Christ.

After the Resurrection that same man stood up and faced both the aristocracy and the mob, and fearlessly declared that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. The man was transformed from a coward to a brave. And all these men, who had formerly been self-seeking, now transformed, became witnesses to the risen Christ and went everywhere to preach Him. Most of them gave up their lives in martyrdom for their faith.

The third transformation was that of their social life. Before the Resurrection the disciples were a band of unrelated individuals; but belief in the Resurrection fused them into a solid, compact body bound to their Master in a vital fellowship. Belief in the Resurrection created the Church, and made of simple units the greatest society that the world has ever known. Put plainly, thousands of people, including "a multitude of priests," who knew for a fact that Jesus had died by crucifixion, deliberately joined a Society whose main business was to affirm that this same Jesus had risen from the dead and was the Lord of Life. Is it rational to believe that a few apostles who were the victims of hallucination could have persuaded these people to accept this truth if it was not the truth? The Church is not built upon a foundation of hysteria. The apostolic

preaching was utterly devoid of anything like fanaticism. There is no raving, no heated appeal, nothing vague or dreamy; in short there is an entire absence of the peculiarities which are everywhere associated with the vapourings of visionaries. On the contrary their preaching was reasoned and based upon the Scriptures. The resurrection was shown to be in the true order of Divine events. The Church, which is a substantial edifice, demands an adequate foundation for its support. It could not have survived during the ages and *been what it is*, had it been founded upon a lie.

These five plain facts are surely indisputable, and they have to be accounted for, adequately. The only cause that has ever been suggested wholly adequate to these effects is the apostolic belief in the Resurrection. Rightly or wrongly, the disciples believed that Christ rose, and that belief created these gigantic effects. So we now arrive at the crucial question: *is the story they believed a true story?*

There are only three possible hypotheses. When the disciples declared that Christ rose from the dead, they either lied, or they were mistaken, or they spoke the simple truth. Let us deal with the first of these—did the disciples lie when they bore witness to the resurrection of Christ from the dead on the third day?

One or two sceptics have said so in former times, but who, to-day, would suggest that the disciples lied? What had they to gain by lying? Persons, as a rule, do not swear falsely for the mere pleasure of it; when they speak falsely it is for the sake of some advantage or gain. But what could be the gain to the disciples if they lied? They either believed in Jesus Christ or they did not. If they did not believe in Him, why should they resurrect Him? If they did believe in Him they could not have lied about Him—such a Christ as they preached. The thing is impossible! There was no gain from men save persecution, hatred, ostracism, and martyrdom. What had they to gain from God? We can read in the New Testament what these same apostles thought of lying. Liars they said are to be cast out from God's presence. There could be no gain then from God, since they believed falsehood banished them from God's presence.

But supposing they did lie, what are the implications? They would have had to remove the stone from the sepulchre, overcome the Roman guard, take the body away, carefully hide it and so marvellously preserve the secret of its resting-place that to this day no person has ever discovered it. And remember, there were five hundred people in this plot, if plot it

was. "He was seen of five hundred brethren at once." Is it possible for five hundred prevaricators to bolster up a falsehood of this order for fifty or sixty years and not betray themselves to the public? We are bound to believe in the honesty of the witnesses if we believe in anything at all. We can then safely put aside this first hypothesis; it will not bear looking into.

What shall we say of the second hypothesis? Were these people mistaken? It is quite possible for a person to be mistaken without deliberately lying. Sincerity is not everything. A man may be sincerely mistaken. Were these people mistaken? If so, they could be mistaken in one of two ways only. They were either imposed upon by themselves, or they were imposed upon by others. Supposing somebody outside the apostolic band imposed upon them, who could that somebody be? Did Jesus Himself impose upon them? That has been seriously suggested.

It was the theory of Dr. Paulus in the early part of the nineteenth century. He declared that Jesus did not die upon the Cross; He only fainted. They placed Him in the tomb while He was still living. After a time He revived; and then He crept out of the tomb and departed while the soldiers slept. Later, the

apostles saw Him, and, believing He had come to life again, they saluted Him as having risen from the dead, and so was born the legend of the Resurrection. Think what that amazing theory involves. It means that a man half-dead, faint with loss of blood, without food for forty-eight hours, His side lanced with a Roman soldier's spear, His feet and His hands pierced by nails, had yet strength enough to roll away the stone from the entrance to the sepulchre, to pass the guards without waking them, to walk eight miles to Emmaus on feet that were broken and sore; then to return to Jerusalem more quickly than two able-bodied men were able to do! Can absurdity go to greater lengths?

The best answer to this strange theory was given by Dr. Strauss, himself a thorough sceptic: "Is it possible," he asks, "that a man, half-dead, who had dragged himself in languor and exhaustion out of his grave, whose wounds required careful and prolonged attention, should have left upon the minds of his disciples the impression of the conqueror of death, and the grave, and that he was the Prince of Life? Such a return to life would only have served to weaken the impression which Jesus had previously made upon them, and could never have changed their grief into enthusiasm, and ex-

alted their admiration into adoration." More than that, it is impossible that Jesus could have imposed upon them. Had He done so then we could not believe in Him at all. We could not even retain Him as a moral teacher.

If what Dr. Paulus suggested took place, Jesus must have known that His disciples were proclaiming everywhere the story of His resurrection; yet He never made the least effort to silence them. How could we believe in Him after that? If Jesus was the One who deceived them, the Christ must go; we cannot retain Him in any capacity whatever. But the Jews, did they deceive the apostles? Did they take away His dead body? Why, then, were they silent when the disciples began to preach the resurrection, and draw people away from the Jewish faith, to empty the synagogues, and to establish a Church? How could the Jews, supposing them to have possessed the dead body, have remained silent? One exhibition of the dead body of Jesus in Jerusalem would have ruined the Christian Church. *But that dead body of Jesus was never produced.* This question of our Lord's dead body is of great importance. It is sometimes said that it really does not matter what became of it. But it matters—a great deal. Christianity is certainly *not* built upon an empty tomb, but

that *empty tomb must be accounted for*, and scepticism always avoids the question. Christ, then, did not impose upon the disciples and the Jews did not impose on them: then we ask did they impose upon themselves? Were they the victims of hallucination? It was Ernest Renan who first gave birth to this theory which runs like this: Mary Magdalene, who owed her moral life to Jesus Christ, was broken-hearted when her friend died. With His passing she lost everything. She haunted His grave. On Easter Day, in the gray of the dawn, the gardener passed by; and she with eyes swollen by weeping looked up, and, perceiving the gardener, imagined that he was Jesus come to life again. She went at once to the disciples, and declared that Christ was risen. They all believed the story of this half demented visionary, and so the legend of the Resurrection came into existence. This, stripped of its embellishments, is the theory of the brilliant Ernest Renan. But, as Dr. Fairbairn said: "If that be true, the apostles are reduced to a society of fools."

But is it true? Was Mary Magdalene the neurotic Renan would have us believe? Her portrait drawn in the Gospels gives us no such impression. On Easter morn she was a woman in despair, and certainly in no mood for

ecstatic visions. When she saw Jesus she mistook Him for the gardener. She does not take the first person she encounters for her Lord; she mistakes her Lord for somebody else, and it is not until He speaks to her, calling her by name, "Mary!" that she recognizes Him. And the apostles, do they give the impression of being neurotics, or men liable to hallucinations? On the contrary they were open-air men; and open-air people, as a rule, are not subject to hallucinations. A parallel has sometimes been drawn between the appearances of the Risen Christ and the apparition of the Virgin Mary to the peasant girl Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes. But nobody who has made a careful study of Bernadette and her surroundings could hold this view. The portrait of Bernadette is in circulation and it completely reveals the secret of Lourdes. There is no mystery about the apparitions to a psychologist who is well aware of the revelation which "mystic dreamy eyes," such as hers, convey. Whoever examines the eyes of that simple girl and follows the whole story of her life—so sad, so unhealthy—can explain Lourdes. The secret of the apparitions lay in the neurotic mind and unhealthy flesh of the peasant girl. Bernadette saw the Virgin Mary, but the Virgin never appeared to

her. The vision was purely subjective. *Nobody else saw the Virgin.* Upon the subjective vision of that one girl has been built the shrine of Lourdes. Now contrast all this with the plain, straightforward story of the Gospels. Bernadette, by her temperament, explains Lourdes. *The apostles of Christ do not explain the resurrection of Christ.* Again, hallucinations are nearly always in the direction of favourite ideas. The Virgin beheld by Bernadette was a lady dressed in blue and white who uttered the words "I am the Immaculate Conception." But across the mountains, at La Salette, there had been another, and an earlier, apparition of the Virgin to some children. Bernadette was familiar with the story of La Salette, and with the picture of the Virgin in blue and white that had been circulated. She retained it in her little mind, and at an appropriate moment it took a subjective form to her. The virgin of the grotto of Lourdes was the phantom of the virgin at La Salette. Bernadette's hallucination was in the direction of a favourite idea. But in the case of the apostles, there was no subjective material out of which a Risen Christ could be fabricated. It was something quite new and unexpected. And so far from being limited to one person, we must remember that

five hundred people saw the Risen Christ at one time. As one great brain specialist said: "Collective hallucinations to that extent are impossible."

One man may be self-deceived, but when five hundred normal people declare they saw Christ, and that He had spoken with them, is it permissible to say they were victims of a common hallucination? Further, the evidence is overwhelming that the visions were frequent and were witnessed by various people at different times and in different places. They were not given to nervous people sitting in darkened apartments working up a materialization, but to normal people in normal conditions. It was not once they saw Him, but continuously during forty days. And the appearances were not casual appearances, but, as Godet says, "they were moral and graded." When Jesus first appeared to them He consoled their broken hearts, afterward He established their faith; finally He instructed them concerning their apostolate. They knew Him to be the same Christ as aforetime. Finally it has to be said that hallucinations have never yet, in this world, produced a strong character. Do we know any person suffering from hallucinations who became stronger in mind and character as the result? The apostles and disciples however

became new men, strong and courageous and great in character as the result of their belief in the Resurrection. *That is, the effect answered completely to the alleged cause.* Think of the logic of Paul, the courage of Peter, the administrative ability of James—are these the results of hallucination? The thing is impossible.

Every Rationalistic theory, then, which seeks to account for the Resurrection, crumbles into dust. There is only one way of accounting for it—*it is true.* Jesus really rose again from the dead on the third day. If historical science be real, then no fact of history is so well attested as the fact of Christ's resurrection. And yet it is true to say that the *final* proof of the resurrection must ever be *personal.* It is only when we come under the empire of Christ and commune with Him that we *personally* know He is alive. The Christian faith, intellectually, is sublime. It has nothing to fear from the assaults of men. But it is a dead faith to any man who cannot complete the apostolic witness by adding, *" He was seen of me also."*

VIII

THE SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

THERE is no such thing as a *mere fact.* All facts are in relation to other things. They have their antecedents and their consequences. They mean something. The more wonderful the fact, the greater will be its meaning.—The rising of Jesus from the dead is a fact of history, but it is a great deal more than that. Christianity declares that it has eternal implications. *It is a gospel.* It proclaims the victory of life. Jesus is the Lord of life. He "could not be holden of death." The victory He won is ours also—in Him. Man now knows that he is not under the tyranny of matter: he has the liberty of the spirit. Hence we offer to Christ our worship and we place in Him our hope. He has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. At His girdle swing the keys of destiny. He rose as the Son of God and as the Son of Man—*both.*

And He continues his redeeming work. He

remains forever the One Priest whose sacrifice and intercession avail for our salvation. He is the eternal prophet who teaches with the final authority. He is the only King of man's life, to direct and to lead it into the true way of progress. And He is alive forevermore.

The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ carries a triple meaning. It is at once a vindication, a justification and a revelation. First of all, it was a vindication of His claims. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. He claimed the right to forgive sins. He claimed a unique relationship to God. He claimed Lordship over death, since He said distinctly that He had the "right" to lay down His life, and the "right" to take it again and that, specifically, on the third day He would rise from the dead. Now, if He did not rise from the dead in the way in which He said He would, all these claims fall to pieces. But He did rise again, and His Resurrection vindicates His claims. "He was declared to be the Son of God, with power by the resurrection from the dead."

Secondly, it was a justification for the Christian. "Jesus was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4: 25). We do not look to a crucifix, but back upon a cross. The crucifix is a cross with

a dead man upon it. We now behold only an empty cross; the Christ who was nailed to it now "sits at the right hand of God," living to make intercession for us. His resurrection is our justification: it guarantees the ultimate perfection of that humanity which follows the way of Jesus and attaches itself to Him. And it gives the justification *in advance.* The guarantee comes not at the end but at the beginning where we most need it.

Thirdly, the Resurrection is a revelation of the future life; the life that we shall one day live beyond the veil. We are all compelled to ask questions about that future life. Such questions are not speculative, but practical. It makes all the difference to us to know whether this present life is a term complete in itself, or whether it is a passage to a larger life. If it is a term ending in itself, then we are justified in saying: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die;" but if it is a passage leading to a larger life, then the man who neglects to prepare for that life is guilty of supreme folly.

Now we can go far toward proving, by reason, the existence of that other life, but what we need is a demonstration, and this is what Christianity professes to offer us. The Resurrection of Christ claims to rest on demonstrative evidence. The evangel declares that

One has risen from the dead, and that His Resurrection is the type of ours. Speaking generally, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ assures us that the triumph rests, not with death but with life. That is its great general message. Its specific message is a revelation of the kind of life the Christian will yet live. It professes to be a *revelation* of a higher order than any known to us upon this planet. Christ's rising was not a *revival* of the old matter, but a transformation of it. The Resurrection body belonged to a new order. Paul speaks of it as the "first fruits of them that are asleep" (1 Cor. 15: 20). It is an illustration taken from the harvest field. That which is first ripe becomes the symbol of the rest of the crop. Our Lord Jesus Christ, Divine Master as He is, is also the representative man, and the "representative Christian." His Resurrection represents two things: It is at once the pledge and the pattern of our own resurrection.

There is here undoubtedly a mystery that we cannot solve at present, but it is only a mystery of *explanation*. We see in the risen body of Christ a working of God beyond our knowledge: it is not on that account contrary to "nature" or incredible for the mind. The "modern man" of all men should find no dif-

ficulty in accepting the Gospel story as true. The old ideas of matter, which were regarded by our fathers as finally fixed, are now suffering the process of disintegration. It is, today, generally admitted that matter has a spiritual basis and that its transformations are unlimited. The transformation of our Lord's body by a special forthputting of divine power, cannot therefore any longer be set aside as an "incredible legend." It is believable, even in the name of science. We need not then humbly apologize for the ancient Christian faith. The Resurrection, or transformation of our Lord's body, is not an incubus to faith: it is rather essential to a full and rich faith. But if there was no Resurrection of Christ, then there is neither "first fruits" nor revelation for us. In this larger light we may see the impossibility of denying the *fact* of the Resurrection while maintaining its *ethic*.

Starting with Paul's illustration of the "first fruits," let us explore the idea and try and gather what the "harvest" for a redeemed humanity will be. First of all let us collect the facts as they are presented to us in the Gospels. And the first fact is this: that the body of Jesus when raised from the dead was the same as before, and yet not the same. The wounds in it were visible. Jesus appeared to

His disciples, saying, "Behold my hands, my feet and my side," and further, "Handle me and see; it is I myself." The body evidently was the same as before the Resurrection. It is equally evident that it was not the same. There was not merely a resuscitation of the flesh; a change had taken place, a very great change. The new body was free from the former material conditions; it was endued with new powers. What were they?

Our Lord suddenly appeared, and as suddenly disappeared. While the disciples were together in the upper room, suddenly Jesus was present with them. How He came to be there they did not know. As suddenly He vanished out of their sight. He could travel very quickly with this body. He was at Emmaus talking to two disciples; suddenly He vanished out of their sight. That evening He was in Jerusalem eight miles away, appearing to a group of people there. The doors were closed, yet this body of His passed clean through them. There is then evidently some connection between the body that died and the body that rose—a connection, observe, yet not a sameness.

The second great fact in the Gospels is this: the resurrection body of our Lord was only seen by persons sympathetic with Him. No

person outside the group of five hundred men and women who were His disciples beheld Him. Scepticism remarks upon this and says, "If the story of the Resurrection is true, why did not Jesus enter into the midst of Jerusalem and show Himself to the people? They would then have been convinced." Would they? To say this is to show little knowledge of history or of the working of the human mind. The fact is that the body of Jesus after the Resurrection was seen only by the sympathetic, those who were in touch with Him. The Pharisees and Scribes saw nothing; the men who murdered Him saw nothing; He appeared to His apostles, to the five hundred of whom Paul speaks, and others.

The third fact is that the one word used in the Gospels to account for these appearances of Christ is the word "manifested." "It came to pass after these things that Jesus manifested himself." What is the implication behind that word? It is that the power of revelation rested not so much with those who saw, as with Him who showed Himself. The idea is that of parting a veil. The one on that side of the veil beholds people on this side who cannot see Him, until He parts the veil, and allows them to see Him. If we put together these three facts—*i. e.*, first, that Christ's body

was the same, yet not the same, being endued with new powers; second, that it was seen only by the sympathetic; and third, that the appearances are explained by the word "manifest" —we reach the conclusion that the body of Jesus which was buried underwent a rapid spiritual transformation. It did not decay: it was transformed. When it rose it really belonged to the spiritual world, but for forty days it moved upon the border of two worlds manifesting itself at various times until finally it ceased to be seen of human eyes.

Such are the facts as set forth in the Gospels. Now is all this fantasy or can we discover any spiritual or scientific law that accounts for it and makes it credible? We may find a little light by means of an illustration or two. For example: A certain number of vibrations are necessary to produce a musical sound. Below a certain number and above a certain number of these vibrations no music will reach us. If the vibrations are too slow or if they are too rapid sound fails to reach our ears. Or again let us take an illustration from colour: What we call colour is, of course, a sense impression; it is a sensation produced by the vibrations of ether-waves. So many million vibrations per second produce the sensation we call violet or blue or red. Below or beyond a certain num-

ber of vibrations there can be no sensation of colour at all. The musical chord vibrating too quickly or too slowly gives no impression of music; that is, our ears can detect no musical sound. The ether waves vibrating below or above a certain rapidity give no sensation of colour: our eye beholds nothing. And may we not say speaking in these terms that the cessation of our Lord's manifestation of Himself to His disciples was due, in part, to their inability to respond to further and higher manifestations. The limit for them had been reached.

Let us not imagine that our eyes represent the limit of vision. They do not at all. We can conceive of a higher order of life in which we, transformed, may see and hear what is impossible for us to see and hear now, bounded as we are by the sense life of our mortality. There was a limit, evidently, to the spiritual manifestation of our Lord, for the appearance ceased after forty days. On the Mount of Ascension Jesus withdrew finally into the spirit world, from where He has not again manifested Himself, save once, and that in a special manner to St. Paul, on the road to Damascus.

One other thing we must understand in order to appreciate fully the appearances of our Lord's resurrection body. We cannot discon-

nect the Resurrection from the Transfiguration. We know what happened there. An immense change took place in the body of Jesus. Professor Godet assumed that this was the moment when Jesus might have returned to His heavenly home. "Ascension was as much the natural way for Jesus as death is to us." The Transfiguration showed that His sacred flesh was so etherealized even then that it already belonged to the higher order of life, but that "Jesus turned back to mortality, and went on to Calvary, for love of us and for our redemption." The Transfiguration revealed in our Lord's body something superior to the gross matter in which we are imprisoned. The modern man is inclined to make sport of this story. But suppose that the modern man is not normal, and that sin has spoiled him.[1] That would account for a great deal. But Jesus was the perfect man, entirely normal, without defect, without fault, without sin. When we look at His body so transfigured, we see what man might have been had sin not had dominion over him. Suppose it should be true that the transfigured body of Jesus is the "type" of the normal man and that our bodies are what they are, subject to disease and decay because some-

[1] See Dr. Newman Smyth's remarkable discourse on "The Limits of Spiritual Manifestation."

thing has gone wrong with us! It is worth thinking over.

We go a stage further and find a further implication in the Resurrection of Jesus. What relation is there between our spiritual personality and our mortal body? I assume belief in the truth that we are here below spiritual personalities, wedded to material bodies. Is there a permanent relation between the two? On this physical plane a material vehicle is absolutely necessary for the expression of our spiritual personality; but is this dependence of the spirit upon a body temporary or permanent? Sir Oliver Lodge, in an article in the *Hibbert Journal,* says: "We must believe that the connection between spirit and body is more than temporary. In essence it is permanent." It is a little startling to find that Paul said practically the same thing long ago. "We wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall *fashion anew* the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory" (Phil. 3: 21).

And again: "We know that if the earthly house of our tent be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens; for in this we groan . . . not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be *clothed upon,* that what is

mortal may be swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. 5: 1)—absorbed by something greater. This mortality is not to cease to exist, but it is to be "swallowed up of life."

And again: "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15: 42). The Apostle teaches then that the connection between spirit and body is permanent in principle. This language is extremely lucid; it states the truth concerning our resurrection in a form to which the modern man can take no exception.

The quality of our Lord's Resurrection body, together with the clear statements of St. Paul concerning the "spiritual body," offer no little light upon a difficult subject.

First, they remove the common misconception which prevails concerning the "resurrection of the body," a conception which could never have obtained had people carefully read their Bibles. New Testament language puts out of court that grotesque conception which some Christians have held, and which sceptics everlastingly combat, of the resurrection of the

flesh. By the resurrection of the body we do not mean the resurrection of the material particles of our flesh. We mean, not continuation, but *transfiguration* and *transformation* after the pattern of the Divine first-fruits. The resurrection of the material flesh is unthinkable. Chemistry decides against it for one thing. Everybody knows what happens when a corpse is put under the ground, or consumed by fire. The particles are disintegrated and disappear; they pass into other forms, but as physical bodies they disappear forever. Those mortal bodies will never be raised again. A man of seventy has had seventy different bodies in the course of his life. The material particles change every year. If the mortal flesh be raised, which body of the seventy will it be—the first or the last? The case will not bear stating. A missionary, for instance, who has been eaten by cannibals, or martyrs like Ridley and Latimer, who were burned to death, or a man in Australia who has left an amputated limb in England—how will these mortal bodies be raised? Chemistry and common sense are against belief in the raising of the material flesh. It is not the resurrection of the literal flesh that the Bible teaches.

Paul teaches something quite different from that. "Thou foolish one, what thou sowest

does not come to life except it die. And what thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be, but a bare grain. God giveth it a body even as it pleased him, and to each seed a body of his own. . . . There are celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies, but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another, so also is the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15). Now what happens when a seed is sown in the ground? We never see that seed again; it never reappears in its old form, but there is a principle of life within the grain that survives and creates a new form. There is a connection between the seed that was and the wheat that is, and in like manner there is a connection between our mortal body and the spiritual body that we shall yet assume—a connection not of sameness as in the case of the grain but of transfiguration. What that connection is no man can tell; we must always remember our ignorance. The point to emphasize is that there is a spiritual body, and in that spiritual body we shall be clothed beyond the veil. We shall be like the first-fruits—our Lord Jesus Christ. But it must always be remembered that in His case there is the exceptional element. For special evidential reasons there was an *immediate* connection established between His old and His new body.

It was necessary for this to be so with *Him.* Nothing of Him saw corruption. With us there must be the passing of the particles of our mortal flesh in a natural manner. Christ is the first-fruits of the Christian harvest; but the process obviously will not be the same for us as for Him. The end will be the same, *i. e.,* the possession of a "body of glory." We can only state the general fact and confess ignorance as to the method. The spiritual body will harmonize with the spiritual home into which we go. The change will be effected by the magician called Life. "That what is mortal may be swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. 5: 4). Life works the transformation. It is life that has fashioned our mortal body; it is life—Christ's life—that will "fashion it anew."

Organization does not cause life; life causes organization. This is a commonplace of biology. St. Paul tells us that when this mortal organization falls to pieces the life of Christ at work in us can "fashion anew" our bodies so as to be "conformed to the body of Christ's glory." Christ is the type to which the Christian conforms. These implications for us of the Resurrection of Jesus are not merely informative, they are inspiring. They serve to quicken the whole of our life; to raise it to a higher plane. They call us to order our

mortal lives in the light of the higher life to which we shall pass. They bring repose to our hearts with regard to the dear ones who have left us. What has become of our holy dead? They are with Christ in glory. Our "dead" "in Christ" are with Him, where we shall be reunited to them. They are in the spiritual world where, by God's mercy, we shall also be—with Christ.

The fortune of the Christian is bound up with Jesus Christ. This orders us to impose discipline upon our mortal bodies. The Bible places great emphasis upon the culture and discipline of the body. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that we may receive the things done in the body whether they be good or bad." Why in the body? There is a spiritual connection between flesh and spirit. They interpenetrate each other. Sins of the mind leave their imprint on the flesh and sins of the flesh react upon the mind. But they have their effect also, it may be presumed, upon the spiritual body which we are even now weaving for our future wearing. We are all amassing spiritual material for our spiritual bodies. What kind of material is it? Just as men carry wounds and scars on their physical bodies, so they may carry scars on their souls and on their spiritual bodies. A great orator

once asked an audience of men: "How would you like to summon all the nasty thoughts and words and unclean things that have kept you company for years, and live with them forever?" It is a stunning question. If we believe in the Resurrection as it is set out in the type of Christ's, then we are under obligation to discipline the entire nature, including the body, so that it may be the temple of the Holy Ghost. With a mind true and pure, in harmony always with God's Spirit, when we pass into the spiritual world, our spiritual bodies will be glorified after the pattern of the risen body of our Lord Jesus Christ. We shall then be part of the true harvest of which He was the first-fruits.

IX

"HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN"

ACCORDING to the Gospels, at the end of the forty days of our Lord's post Resurrection life, during which He manifested Himself at intervals to His disciples, there occurred an event which is known to us as the Ascension. For some reason or other the Ascension has never gripped the imagination, the heart, and the mind of the Christian Church as the Resurrection has. On the contrary it has been a stumbling block to many Christians, while it remains a target for the ridicule of unbelievers. We are told that it complicates our faith, and is an encumbrance to it. But it can be shown that the Ascension of our Lord is at once historically necessary, and religiously a most fitting article of faith, and that for a fourfold reason: It is a confirmation of Christ's word; a consummation of Christ's life; a completion of what may be described as the love circuit of Christ, and a confirmation of human faith. At the outset, it is necessary to say that the word "ascension"

is no more than a term of accommodation. It cannot be pressed in any geographical sense since in a universe like ours, and particularly in a world like ours which is always in movement there can be no fixed "up" nor "down." We must get beyond the word to the truth that lies behind it.

Let us briefly consider the four points just enumerated. First, the Ascension is set forth as a Confirmation of Christ's word. Sound criticism leaves undisturbed our Lord's prediction that He should "ascend up where he was before." Jesus did definitely speak of His ascension. On the morning of the Resurrection, He said to Mary Magdalene, "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended . . . and behold I ascend to my Father and to your Father." The Ascension was needed according to the records to confirm Christ's word. Secondly, it was also a consummation of Christ's life and was necessary to give finality to His Resurrection. The Resurrection having taken place, the Ascension followed as a necessity of the case, and it fits in with the whole story with admirable precision. The final view the Church had of her Lord was not that of a defeated man, but of One who as Victor resumed the glory which for thirty-three years He had laid aside for His life of earthly humil-

iation. Thirdly, the Ascension was the completion of what we may call the Divine love circuit. At the Incarnation, the veil parted to reveal Him; at the Ascension the veil again parted to receive Him. As He came from the Father, so He returns to the Father; thus completing the redemptive circuit. As the water which issues from the ocean returns thither when it has completed its mission of fructifying the earth, so Jesus Christ, who came from the Father, returned to the Father when His earthly work was over; thus He completed His love-circuit. Finally, the Ascension was for the confirmation of human faith. Had the Ascension not taken place, there would always have been a suspicion that Jesus had returned to earth to die in the ordinary way. The final withdrawal confirmed faith in the reality of the Resurrection. His work on earth over, Jesus withdrew into the spiritual sphere to continue His work from the higher plane.

The New Testament account of the Ascension is very meagre. We have only three historic items recording it, *i. e.*, Mark 16, Luke 24, and Acts 1. In Mark 16: 19, the sentence runs thus: "After the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." But in the Revised Version the last chapter of

Mark ends with the eighth verse. Verses nine to twenty are entirely omitted. In the margin of the Revised Version there is a note to the effect that these verses are not found in the oldest Greek manuscripts. So we are not entitled to use these verses as evidence. There is left to us then in the Gospels only the account of St. Luke, in chapter 24 and in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. But St. Luke is a writer upon whom we can depend. He tells us that he traced all his material to its origin. It is he, so careful in this respect, who gives to us a full account of the Ascension. But in dealing with this question we do not begin with the Gospels, for they are by no means the earliest documents in the New Testament.

The earliest documents are certain of St. Paul's epistles addressed to persons who had received the Gospel in spirit and in story—the latter orally delivered to them. In these early epistles which date from the year 52 A. D. we find that the fact of the Ascension is everywhere taken for granted. In the Epistle to the Philippians, St. Paul gives us (chapter 2: 9) the whole story of Christ's humiliation and of His exaltation. "He humbled himself even unto death . . . wherefore also God highly exalted him and gave unto him the name

which is above every other name." In the first Epistle to Timothy, 3: 16, we have a fragment of liturgical song-prayer—the earliest in the New Testament—and in this prayer is embedded the great statement: "He was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

The Epistle to the Hebrews was written earlier than the year 70—before the fall of Jerusalem. The writer says, "Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God" (4: 14). And again, "Jesus entered [within the veil] as a forerunner" (6: 19–20). Again, "Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands . . . but into heaven itself" (9: 24). It would be easy to multiply such instances. It is clear then that, although the historic account of the Ascension in the Gospels is meagre, we have in the early epistles a wealth of material which is based upon the assumption that the historic Ascension is true.

With this agrees the earliest preaching in the Acts of the Apostles. In the very first sermon preached by Peter at Pentecost we have the words "Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted" (Acts 2: 33). Again in Peter's second sermon, delivered in Jerusalem, the

same fact is emphasized: "Him did God exalt with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour" (Acts 5:31). Indeed throughout the earliest apostolic preaching there runs the implied historic fact of the Ascension of Christ.

When we carefully examine the Gospel story of this event we are impressed with the almost stern soberness of the recital. There are no "purple patches"; there is nothing to feed the imagination; nothing, indeed, upon which Christian art should have seized for the production of fanciful and childish pictures of the Ascension. The difficulties which beset people concerning this article of the Christian faith are due, not so much to their reason, as to their imagination. Imagination has done much to obscure the real meaning of the great event. Christian art has often presented a picture of a material body like ours rising to the sky, and men imagine the Gospel records demand this material view, hence they oppose it.

But it is not the Bible that is at fault so much as an imagination betrayed by Christian art. There is nothing in the Gospel record resembling those stories of levitation of which we read in legend. Mohammed is said to have made a night journey to heaven upon a horse. He is supposed to have travelled upon this

animal through space, and to have returned to earth early in the morning. Mohammedans believe that story, but Christians are not asked to believe anything so absurd concerning our Lord's home going. The Gospel account of the Ascension has no relation whatever to anything absurd, mythical, unreal, or unintelligent. The story is simple and sober.

If it be not a record of an actual happening then how did it arise? How did the Church come to believe in it? There was nothing in the Jewish religion to account for it. There were no materials out of which they could have weaved this remarkable story; not even out of Apocalyptic literature. There was nothing in the Old Testament out of which they could construct this marvellous story of the Son of God returning to the Father. There was nothing in pagan legend that resembled it. Ernest Renan took the view that it was simply a subjective impression on the minds of the disciples! The disciples thought they saw their Master ascend. A passing cloud obscured Him from sight and they never saw Him again. And out of that story the Ascension grew! But if that was so, why did matters end there? Why was not there something further? Why should the apostles henceforth settle down to hard work? If all was hallucination or subjective,

there is no reason for what followed in the Church.

We need to clear our minds as to what really happened, and particularly we need to set aside all such bathos as is indicated in the following words which express the attitude of many toward the whole subject. The writer, who has no use for the extraordinary in human life, says: "In these days ascending has no meaning for us. Candidly, if the writer of the Gospel had possessed our astronomical knowledge, would the story of the Ascension ever have been written at all? . . . For the stupendous and absolutely impossible miracle of the Ascension we have no satisfactory evidence. Is it not time that we should ask the question, 'Do we really believe that extraordinary levitation occurred and that Jesus Christ was seen rising in the air until passing clouds concealed Him from view, and that then He passed through the air to a place called heaven?'" And the answer is we are asked to believe nothing so grotesque! The Bible is emphatic upon one point—namely, that "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." The body of Jesus that "ascended" was not a material body like ours. It was a spiritual body belonging already to the spiritual world.

The Biblical account of the matter is straight-

forward enough. Mark says, "He was received up into heaven." St. Luke says, "A cloud received him out of their sight." If we can suppress our imagination and not allow childish pictures to dominate us, we shall find these two sentences present us with the absolute minimum of description in terms that are capable of a rational and spiritual interpretation. All we are entitled to say is that our Lord was shut off from earth. What we call the Ascension was His entrance upon His spiritual reign. His spiritual body passed into the spirit sphere where He now reigns as the absolute Master.

That spiritual world is represented in the Bible as being near to us. We have innumerable stories of the disclosure to man of that mysterious world. In the light of modern psychical research we can no longer dismiss with a gesture the Biblical stories of Elisha and the angelic host, the appearance of Moses and Elias on the Mount of Transfiguration, the trance hearing of St. Paul and other similar phenomena. These stories are now no longer isolated. They are seen in the light of growing experience, to be part of a vast body of testimony to the reality of the spiritual world. When we have heavily discounted all mediumistic claims, and sifted to the extreme limit

supposed supernatural appearances, we are still left with such an amazing amount of genuine material, that to deny its reality is an act of unpardonable folly. To speak of one thing only, the carefully investigated cases, numbering several thousands, which M. Camille Flammarion has collected over a period of many years, are so overwhelming and impressive that we can do no other than accept them as true. And what experience witnesses to, science and philosophy confirm.

It is now some years since Professors Balfour Stewart and Tait, two eminent scientists (and also Elders of the Presbyterian Church), published their book "The Unseen Universe," the main thesis of which is that the visible material universe is but the temporary expression of an invisible and spiritual universe. From the invisible the visible has proceeded, and when the visible has run its course, it will be re-absorbed into the invisible. The world smiled when this book first appeared. To-day it does not smile, for its thesis is supported by the teaching of modern science. The whole conception of matter has entirely changed. The greatest scientists are telling us that we must think of matter in entirely new terms: in terms indeed, of the spiritual. F. W. H. Myers, author of those two wonderful volumes, "Hu-

man Personality" and "Survival after Death," ventured the prediction that within one hundred years every sane man in the world will believe in the Resurrection of Christ (and, I would add, the Ascension also), not only on Biblical, but also on scientific grounds. And these are definitely pointing in this direction. Rehabilitation of belief in the spiritual as supreme is certain and science is making no small contribution to it. The Victorian materialism is dead and discredited.

Nobody to-day has a good word to say for it. It is now the fashion to regard Herbert Spencer as a "philosophical charlatan." We shall yet understand that our Lord, as the Son of God, came forth from the invisible spiritual world, became incarnate, was crucified, arose from the dead and returned with a glorified body to His first home. And the Ascension will yet be seen to be quite natural to Him and also to be part of the universal order.

The Ascension then was in reality the passing of our Lord's spiritual body into the spiritual world that surrounds us. No point of geography marks it. The world in which He now lives and reigns is invisible to the human eye, but it is real.

What was the meaning of the Ascension for our Lord, and what is its meaning for us?

There are certain implications that we must face. For Him its meaning is summed up in one word: "He sat down at the right hand of God." The meaning of the Ascension for us is summed up in the other word: "He is our forerunner." These two sentences comprise the whole. Now, what is the meaning of that expression: "At the right hand of God"?

It is purely a Biblical phrase indicating the possession of supreme power. To be at God's right hand is to have supreme power, and that is what our Lord possesses. He has a threefold supremacy—a supremacy of priesthood, a supremacy of prophecy, and a supremacy of kingship. First, a supremacy of priesthood. In what work is Jesus Christ engaged on the other side of the veil? In the work of priesthood. "He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7: 25). He is alive ever exercising a ministry of priesthood. "He ever liveth to make intercession for us," and "to save to the uttermost them that come unto God through him." The Ascension, then, is no mere dogma, beginning and ending with itself. It is linked to a force of priesthood which Christ exercises in the spiritual world on behalf of man. But He possesses a second thing—a

supreme power of prophecy. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go I will send him unto you." "I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth, for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, these shall he speak, and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come" (St. John 16: 7–12). That is the second thing that arises out of Christ's ascension—progress, prophecy, enlarged truth.

His passing into the spiritual world enlarged His sphere of influence. In the days of His flesh He was necessarily limited by the conditions of his human life. He told His disciples that He had much more to teach them, but they were not ready for it. He promised that from the other side He would continue to teach and to lead through His Spirit, and that the whole domain of truth should be eventually theirs. He guaranteed progress in truth. This is a thought that should appeal to modern people who are enamoured of progress. It should also make them pause and ask in what true progress consists. Progress is not to tear up the ancient root and plant in its place a new

branch. No fruit is ever borne in that way. It consists in retaining the old root and sending it ever deeper into the soil, but also developing ever wider branches until the limit of development is reached. Many who call themselves "progressives" have no fixed root. They sever themselves from the past, imagining that only the new things are true. On the other hand there are many Christian people who cling to the root—to the past—and suspect every new development. Both these positions are fatal to real progress. Christ remains ever the same, and nothing can destroy the fact that He appeared in time, became incarnate, died, and rose again for our redemption. But our comprehension of Christ and our application of His truth to life must continually develop. And this is only possible as we accept His supremacy as prophet and faithfully follow the guidance of His Spirit. There is no risk in this so long as the human spirit remains humble, modest and obedient.

The third and last thing that Christ exercises is the supreme power of Kingship. In the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians there is a wonderful picture drawn by St. Paul: "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." "He gave some to be apostles; and

some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers." Why did He give these? "For the perfecting of the saints." It is a carpenter's word, meaning to fit part to part and so complete the whole. Christ gave varied ministries, to put Christian people into proper relation with God and each other, to fit, to adjust them for life. That is one of the fruits of the Ascension. But it is set forth under a vivid illustration; that of a Roman military victory. The conqueror enters the city, bringing his captives with him, and then distributes gifts to men. Under this simile St. Paul sets forth the victorious work of our Lord beyond the veil. "He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." Every great and good gift there is in the Church and world to-day streams from the person of the living Christ, who is at work close to us on the other side of the veil. If when we say we believe Christ ascended into heaven we understood more fully its meaning, how enriched would life be! We may be victors because He is King; we may be perfectly saved because He is our priest; we may be perfectly instructed because He is our prophet. These are the consequences for our life, of Christ having gone beyond the veil.

There is an implication of the Ascension for ourselves. "We have an anchor of the soul, a

hope both sure and steadfast, and entering into that which is within the veil whither as a forerunner Jesus entered for us" (Heb. 6: 19). A "forerunner" is one who runs on before to announce a coming, and to make preparation for it. That is what Jesus has done. He has gone before to prepare for our coming. On the night of His betrayal He said, "Let not your heart be troubled. In my Father's house there are many abiding places. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." It is a great thing to have some one precede us and prepare a place for us, to know that when we cross the border we shall not wander in an unexplored country. There will be a Friend waiting for us. When our time comes for passing into the spirit world, we shall go to no cold and solitary country, but to a home prepared by the Christ who has gone before. Can there be a greater consolation for the heart?

"Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe Thy only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens; so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end."

X

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

A CENTURY ago the Divinity of Jesus Christ was commonly "proved" by an appeal to His miracles. Christians repeated the word of Nicodemus, "No man can do the works thou doest except God be with him." To-day the pendulum has swung to the opposite extreme.

There are many earnest Christian people who follow Christ, and who accept the New Testament as their guide, who nevertheless are in trouble about the miracles. They do not know how to "place" them—particularly in the light of that mass of knowledge that has come to us through modern science. With others there is a tendency to drop miracles altogether on the ground that a non-miraculous Christianity is more credible than a miraculous one. They say we can retain the ideas and ideals of the Gospel without being bound to their form.

Meanwhile, the lookers on make merry over the spectacle. "Christians," they say, "of the Protestant Churches do not know where they

are. They have eliminated the supernatural little by little, until at last there is nothing but the shell of their religion left." There can be little doubt that the Roman Catholic Church has gained from Protestantism and that Protestants have lost to indifferentism or scepticism no inconsiderable number of people on this account. We ought to try and make up our minds about the matter in a way that is at once rational and devout.

With those superior persons who mistake a wave of the hand for a serious argument we have nothing to do. "Miracles do not happen," they say, and that is the beginning and end of the thing for them. Persons who so airily dismiss a grave matter may, in turn, themselves expect to be easily and airily dismissed. Where no reason is advanced, no reason need be opposed. When persons will not condescend to offer some show of reason for their assertions, we must not be arraigned if we, on our part, decline controversy with such. To reason we will oppose reason, but to a mere dictum it is sufficient to oppose a mere dictum.

There are two preliminary things to be stated. The first is this: we are by no means tied down to the English word "miracle." It might be better indeed to abandon it as liable to mislead. The word "miracle" is an Eng-

lish word, or rather a foreign word untranslated, but it quite properly disappears from the Revised Version. There are, in that version, three other words used in place of the word "miracle." If we can find a better English word (a word, observe, because the word is the stumbling block in many cases) than the word "miracle" we are quite at liberty to use it. The essential thing is to hold to the fact that is behind the word. The revisers of the New Testament employ better words than the word "miracle." They used "mighty works" and "energies." When we speak of a "miracle" we think of something wonderful belonging to the order of magic. Is it necessary to say that the "mighty works" of our Lord Jesus Christ have nothing whatever to do with magical manifestations, and we ought no longer to employ any word that suggests these things. A second preliminary thing is this: We are frequently told that what we call "miracles" (using the word simply for the purpose of convenience) do not belong to the original Gospel at all; they represent a legendary growth of a late date. But this position cannot be sustained for a moment because, in the earliest Gospel—Mark—we have the most of "miracle." By the general admission of scholars Mark goes back nearest to the sources,

and it is in that Gospel that we have most of "miracle." If then the "miracles" represent a legendary growth as frequently alleged, we should find them complete in the latest Gospel, and not in the earliest. But the singular thing is, that in the latest Gospel—John—which dates between 90 and 100 A. D., there is least of "miracle." So that the idea continually bruited to-day about legendary growth obviously is without foundation. If it were true, Mark should have the least about "miracle," and John the most, but as we see, the reverse is the case. We are no nearer a solution of the matter by referring the whole question to the domain of legend.

The first emphasis must be placed upon what may be called the master miracle. It is absurd to commence with such outposts as the affair of the swine at Gadara and make the whole question turn upon that, as Huxley, in his controversy with Gladstone, sought to do.—It is a fundamental principle that the worker must be greater than his work. The master miracle of the Gospels is not the raising of Lazarus from the dead; nor the walking on the water; nor the turning of water into wine; nor the multiplication of loaves and fishes. The master miracle is Jesus Christ Himself. He is the great miracle—a miracle of holiness, a miracle

of personality, a miracle of love, a miracle of power, a miracle of manhood, a miracle of divinity. It is in the light of His Supreme Person that we must study the "miracles," and we may then see that His "mighty works" were entirely harmonious with His unique Person; and further that they are part of Himself. The mistake commonly made concerning the miracles of our Lord is to look upon them as something quite apart, detached from the "Gospel," and capable of separate treatment. Such a view is utterly astray and quite unscientific. The miracles of Christ are part of Christ, and we cannot consider them apart from Him.

As He was unique, so are they unique. There is nothing else like them. If any one desires to understand how perfectly exceptional are the miracles of Jesus Christ, he has only to compare them with the stories of other miracles with which the world abounds. The immense abyss between the Gospel miracles and legendary happenings can best be understood by a close study of the *Apocryphal Gospels,* where any number of impossible and puerile stories are recorded. *Such stories as these are not in our Gospels.*

It is only by comparing the two that we perceive the difference between the chaff and the

wheat. We must understand, further, that the miracles of our Lord were not prodigies—that is to say, they were not mere displays of wonderful power for the purpose of startling people. Matthew Arnold, referring to the miracles of Christ, asked, "What evidence of authority could it be if a person changed a pen into a pen-wiper before our eyes?" But when he asked that ridiculous question Matthew Arnold fell a great way below his own proper intellectual level. To change a pen into a pen-wiper would be a trick of conjuring, without moral value, and there is nothing of that character in the four Gospels. Nothing there of the merely marvellous, nothing of the merely super-normal, nothing of the merely astonishing. There is nothing that in the least degree resembles the changing of a pen into a pen-wiper for the sake of exhibiting cleverness. The miracles of Christ are absolutely unique. They have nothing to do with prodigies or displays of occult power. Further, if we read carefully and without prejudice the four Gospels, we must be struck with the severe economy which marks the performance of our Lord's miracles. He never wrought a miracle to astonish. He never wrought a miracle for His own personal enrichment. He who could feed five thousand people from five loaves and two fishes could

yet say that "the Son of Man hath no place where to lay his head."

But still more astonishing. He never wrought a miracle for the hurt of His enemies. When Simon Peter drew his sword and severed the ear of Malchus, Jesus touched the sufferer and healed him. At that supreme moment Jesus Christ wrought a work of healing. Sometimes He refused to work miracles. And often the Lord enjoined silence upon those who were the subjects of His mighty works. The severe economy of the miracles is an outstanding and wonderful thing. It is clear then that the miracles of Christ whatever they were are taken completely out of the region of wonderland into a moral and spiritual region. They are not to be regarded as mere displays of power, but they must be regarded from the moral and spiritual standpoint.

Studying the matter more closely we perceive that the miracles of our Lord are entirely harmonious with His person and with His purpose. In St. Luke 4 and St. John 10 we have a threefold key that completely unlocks the mystery of Christ's miracles. In Luke 4: 14 we have the account of the commencement of Christ's public ministry. What is the key-note? The temptation over, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee."

The power in which our Lord lived His life and work was the power of the Holy Spirit. He commenced His public ministry thus, and continued so until the end. Later Jesus began His work as a preacher. What is the key-note of His ministry? "He opened the book and found the place where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he appointed me to preach good tidings unto the poor; he hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4: 18). In other words, Jesus appears as the repairer of human damage and the perfecter of human life.

In St. John 10: 10, the whole ministry of Christ is summed up in a sentence: "I came that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." These three passages sum up our Lord's purpose and programme. The power in which He lived and by which He accomplished His work was the power of the Spirit. And His programme for men was to repair human damage and to fulfill human destiny. These three things give us the triple key for the unlocking of the mystery of our Lord's miracles.

As already intimated "miracles" are desig-

nated in the Revised Version "mighty works," and "energies." Both of these are scientific words. The word "dunamis" is the word from which we derive our English word dynamic. The power then by which Jesus wrought His mighty works was a Divine energy —a force of the Divine Spirit, having authority over nature and man. It is from this point of view that we must regard His miracles. It is recorded that He walked on the water, raised the dead, and stilled the tempest. The modern man says he does not believe these things occurred. But the Christ, as we have seen, is special and unique. Why should He not do special and unique works? It is not a question of "anybody" doing these works, but a question of Christ doing them. Are we in a position to say that there is no higher power in the universe than we know or that we at present can use?

But now let us use the second key. Christ came to bring light to darkened minds and souls. If He had power to lighten darkened minds, why should He not have the power to lighten darkened eyes? If He could do the greater why not the lesser? He came to bring dead souls to God, and if it pleased Him to raise dead bodies for a special purpose, why should He not do it? Do we know all the

mystery of life and death? If the evidence is there that He did so, why should we pit our ignorance against it?

Again: why did Jesus walk on the sea? Was it simply to show that He could perform a prodigy? No, it was to relieve the distress of His friends in the little boat. It was a work of love, of benevolence. Why did He multiply the loaves and the fishes? Again, it was to relieve human need. The miracles of Christ fit in with the powers He possessed and the programme of redemption that He came to carry out. The third and last thing is that they fit in with Christ's programme of fulfilling human destiny. Jesus Christ came to give life—spiritual, "eternal" life—life to the spirit, *life to the entire man.* But body and spirit are very closely allied. It is hard to tell where the body ends and the soul begins. Who can explain the mystery of spirit and matter?

Another great word for "miracle" in the Revised Version is "sign." "These signs Jesus did." Jesus Christ's miracles were signs: signals, the ringing of a bell, to call attention in the lower sphere to something He was doing in the higher sphere. Further, not only were the miracles of Christ harmonious with His person and purpose, but they were necessary to them. Jesus Christ was at home in two

worlds. He spoke about the spiritual world as if He knew all about it—as He did. "The Son of Man came down from heaven." "Glorify me with the glory that I had with thee before the world was." He speaks as one who had been there. He was at home in two worlds, and had His life been without "miracles," He Himself would have been a contradiction. To eliminate the miracles would be to impoverish absolutely our conception of Jesus Christ. If we rid ourselves of the miraculous Christ, who did miraculous works, we shall find ourselves with an anæmic religion, entirely valueless for spiritual and ethical purposes. But are the stories historically true? The miracles of Christ are a genuine part of apostolic tradition. They are not a later interpolation. Peter on the Day of Pentecost pointed to them. In Jerusalem, where Jesus Christ was crucified, he speaks of the mighty works and wonders and signs, "as you yourselves know." It was an appeal to what they had seen. None of Christ's contemporaries denied the reality of the miracles; they tried to explain them, which is quite another thing. They said, "By Beelzebub, the prince of the devils, casteth he out devils." The apostles, too, who record Christ's miracles, also record their own great works. But it is

very remarkable that they always attribute them to the power of Christ's name, and not to their own power. The evidential value of this is not small.

Further, the disciples who recorded the miracles of Jesus never record any "Nature miracles" of their own. They attribute to Jesus Christ Nature miracles—power over wind and sea—but never any such to themselves. Theirs were all works of healing. If these disciples had wished to idealize Jesus Christ and add legend to history, would they have recorded even miracles of healing of themselves? If they spake falsely about the whole thing, it must be admitted that they were not very picturesque in their falsehood.

But how can we believe in the miracles of Christ in the light of the modern outlook upon Nature? We are told that modern science has made belief in them impossible. Is that true? Suppose that science should have its false prophets as well as religion! May there not be false prophets in the lecture-room as well as in the pulpit? It is not true that "science" says miracles have never happened; some scientists say so. "Science" itself cannot say so, since other men who are equally good scientists believe in the "miraculous." The objection, in the name of science, to miracles,

is a double one and is based on two false premises; *i. e.*, first, that miracle is an "interference" with Nature from without, and second, that God is no longer at work in His own world. God may have created the world, but He has now left it to itself, and He no longer interferes in its management. Both these assumptions are entirely untrue. Nature as we understand it, and Nature as God knows it, may be very different, and we cannot measure the whole by our part.

"All's love yet all's law," as Browning says. It is not modest to assume that the universe as we know it is the universe as it really is. Consider what rapid strides we have made during the last hundred years! Is it scientific to assume that the mechanical and chemical elements that we are just beginning to understand are the only powers that exist in the universe, in the name of which we may deny the mighty works of Christ? The second false assumption is that God is no longer at work in His own world. But the tendency of all modern thinking is toward the belief in a God immanent in the universe; and ever at work in it. This is not to deny His Transcendence but to affirm something else. Long ago Jesus expressed this truth in one sentence—"My Father worketh hitherto and I work." St. Paul

states the case in the sentence, "He is in all things, and in him all things hold together." That is not Pantheism but Theism.

But belief in the Immanence of God leads to the conclusion that He is at work in ordinary things as well as in extraordinary things. Yet there is always room for any display of His power that His wisdom and love deem fit to exercise. Sir Oliver Lodge pictures a train going through from the Cape to Cairo. It runs at the rate of sixty miles an hour without stopping; passing through a savage country. Every day for a year this express passes until the natives assume that the train runs by some fixed law, and cannot otherwise go. But one day a white man explains that the running of this train is arranged in the directors' office. "Directors' office," they cry; "we believe in no such office; we have never seen it." All they believe is that the train runs day after day in the same manner, and that it cannot run otherwise. The white man explains, however, that it is possible to get the train stopped *en route* if the directors see reason for it. The natives reply, "Train stop! Impossible! Miracles do not happen!" And yet we know that the train may be stopped.

The illustration is a little rough, and by no means perfect. We do not conceive of the

universe in terms of machinery and a directors' office. All terms in use to-day are biological and vitalistic. And what happens with directed machinery does not happen with living things. Yet the *principle* of the illustration is sound and it is simply this—that the living power of God is equal to modifications of ordinary movements and events, if there is sufficient reason for such modification. Nature is not a closed system in which things must always happen in one way. "Law" can modify "law." A spiritual law can operate from above in the control of matter. The last word is always with mind. There is room therefore in a world controlled by "law," for those manifestations of spiritual energy resulting in exceptional changes, which the Gospels attribute to Jesus Christ.—Whether they happened or not is entirely a question of evidence.

The miracles of Christ were a special sign, a signal, a ringing of a bell in the natural world to call attention to His working in the higher realm. But the question is bound to be asked, How is it that we have no miracles to-day?

And the reply generally given is for the same reason that for grown men the alphabet is no longer necessary, being absorbed in a full vocabulary. There is no need for them. We have Jesus reigning over human hearts and

wills, and there is no need now for a repetition of His miracles. Did He not say, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

Yet this cannot be the complete truth. An increasing number of people have come to believe that at least the healing works of Christ should be repeated to-day, and that, in point of fact, they *are* repeated. The handing over of the body to the physician and the surgeon (who, in a number of cases, are pure materialists), and the soul to the minister of religion, is seen to be a poor division of labour. Soul and body are no longer sharply divided, as once they were. The best of the physicians employ spiritual methods of healing. Drugs are increasingly discredited. What may be called *lower* spiritual healing is in constant practice. But often enough, this has no reference whatever to Jesus Christ.

Some "mental healers," indeed, are definitely anti-Christian. The whole round of their operations begins and ends with the human organism. All the completing life forces, they affirm, are "within ourselves." The increasing Christian view is that the mighty works of Christ were Divine and that such works may be wrought to-day by persons who take seriously His word, "He that be-

lieveth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do because I go to the Father." To "believe" on Him in this sense is to live on a spiritual plane in complete union with Him. A perfect loyalty to Him might result in the exercise of quite new and striking "powers," done in His name, and by His force, that would convince a sceptical world of the reality of His presence with His Church, and also of the reality of the Gospel stories which affirm His mighty working in the long ago.

The best people in the world are moving forward to fuller spiritual conceptions of human life and are believing in the exercise of mighty powers which, through unbelief, has been in abeyance for centuries, save here and there. When the Church comes into her full spiritual Pentecost and ceases to think in material terms, then we shall see a new breaking forth of the energies of God, which will compel all men to acknowledge "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever."

XI

JESUS CHRIST THE REGENERATOR OF THE WORLD

IT was Tuesday in the week of the Crucifixion. Jerusalem was unusually crowded with visitors who had arrived from all parts to assist in the solemn celebrations of the great Jewish paschal feast. The excitement caused by the triumphal procession of Jesus Christ on Palm Sunday had not yet subsided. Certain Greeks who were in Jerusalem for the Festival, moved by intense interest, desired an interview with Him, who, two days previously, had stirred the city and set men thinking. They wished to speak with this Royal Man, who, simple peasant as He appeared to be, nevertheless bore the carriage of a Conqueror. Jesus received them and spake to them a most remarkable word. In a sentence He overturned their material expectations by announcing His forthcoming humiliation and death. It was true that He was destined to conquer, but His method of victory did not follow the order prescribed by the vanquishers of mankind. He likened Himself to

a grain of wheat which must "die" before it could fructify. Within a few hours vile and sordid men would seize Him, bear false witness against Him, overcome Him by sheer brute force, nail Him to the Cross, and keep their vigil while His life ebbed away. But that death, He declared, was His predestined way to victory. He had not come into the world to multiply processions and to establish a temporal Kingdom. The Empire that He was founding was of another order. His subjects were not vassals, cowed in the presence of a police or a soldiery that compelled obedience: they were free men drawn to Him by the magnetism of a Personality which compelled by the force of truth and love. His Cross, He said, was the magnet by which the entire world should be drawn to Him.

Three days later He hung crucified upon the summit of Calvary—His prediction was fulfilled to the letter. He proved Himself to be a prophet in the announcement of the mode of His death. Was He also a true prophet in predicting that all men should be drawn to Him?

Nearly nineteen full centuries have passed since the tragedy of Calvary was consummated. The era of prophecy has passed, we live in the light of history, and in its light we

see that the words of Jesus have been fulfilled. In the broader sense Jesus Christ has changed the face of the world, and men, despite themselves, have been "drawn" to Him. After the cruel illusions of a century of industrial progress, in which wealth and prosperity have been challenged by the Frankenstein of poverty and social revolt; and after the still more cruel illusions which a world war has exposed, the world's best thinkers are slowly reaching the conclusion that the anti-Christian way of living has been fundamentally wrong in principle and oppressive in action, and that the only true way of social salvation lies in a return to the ethic of Jesus Christ. The leaders of the world, with a few notorious exceptions, are being "drawn" to Christ, to this extent at least. —Externally He is drawing men to Himself, to His law of love, to His method of settling differences, to His way of regarding God and man, to His programme for human life. The "Story of Christ," as written by Giovanni Papini, is something more than the literary production of a journalistic genius. It is an advertisement that other men, besides himself, have received the shock of their lives through the mad experiences of the last decade, and that they also, with him, have renounced their atheism and found in Jesus Christ the One Per-

son who alone is worthy, by reason of right, to govern the conscience and life of mankind. Year by year serious people, who reflect upon the miseries of life, are coming more completely within the circle of the attraction of Jesus. Not yet have "all men," even externally, been drawn to Him, but time and events are with Him, and the hour must come when His prediction will be absolutely fulfilled.

Meanwhile He is drawing people to Himself internally. His love and power, from the beginning, have captured and continue to capture multitudes of men and women whose allegiance to Him is Sovereign; to whom His every word is law, and to whom His will is the supreme thing in life. It is in the attraction of these souls that His word is fully accomplished, even now. The fact that these His adorers and devotees are in a minority in the midst of the world in no way detracts from the greatness of Christ's promise. Externally He draws all: He makes all aware of His presence and His power. The world is His and He retains its government. At times it appears as if men ruled the world according to their own passions. But things are not as they seem to be. The free will of man is allowed an immense latitude, but history makes it clear that there is always a limit beyond which hu-

man pride is not suffered to venture. Revolutions and wars with their attendant wretchedness represent the automatic punishment which resistance to the Divine Order brings in its train. So far from the miseries of human life demanding as their explanation the *absence* of Christ: they are the announcement of His presence as the restorer of Order by the natural law of "whatever a man or a nation sows that also shall he (or it) reap." It is through pain that wilful men have to learn to follow those laws of life which bring happiness only to the obedient. And in that pain we must discover the healing presence of Christ.

The drawing to Christ which is of real worth must be *internal*. On His part the attraction is ever exercised. On the part of man there must be coöperation with and surrender to Him. It is no reflection upon His power that men withhold from Him their confidence. Jesus Christ will never *compel* men to love and serve Him and to obey His laws. Moral and spiritual obedience must always be free. It is no reflection upon the attractive power of the sun that certain slum dwellers and others elect to hide themselves from its rays and to immure themselves in their own squalid habitations. And if men will not yield to the attraction of Christ, let Him not be blamed: the fault must

be placed to the account of human ignorance or perversity.—But yielded to, willingly or not, the action of Jesus Christ upon the world has been a victorious action. He was lifted up, and both in the broader and in the narrower sense He has "drawn all men" unto Him.

The death of Jesus on the Cross was an event which in the esteem of His contemporaries has no extraordinary significance. It was hurriedly planned and hurriedly executed. All men in their hearts must have known that it was an act of supreme injustice, but who could have imagined that its consequences would be Eternal and that from that hour humanity would begin to date a new epoch? Roman historians give it no place. The death itself seemed to be a mere incident. The manner of the death—crucifixion—would render it still more improbable that the world would ever be regenerated by its means. So far from "drawing" all men unto Him, the Cross would more likely repel men from Him. For the Cross was an instrument of execution reserved chiefly for slaves and criminals. This *infelix arbor,* this *crux damnata,* this *servile supplicium,* as the Romans variously called the Cross: how could it ever become the symbol of all that is dearest and noblest and most Divine in the world? How could He, who in the year 29

of our epoch, hung transfixed to the horrible gallows, "draw" all men unto Him by means of that very lifting up? Yet it is a simple fact that the Cross of Christ has been the greatest redemptive factor in the life of humanity. Nothing in the world can compare with its magnetic power. Until the weight of His sacred body hung upon the infamous wood, the Cross had no association with anything save dishonour and defeat. But since He touched it, it has become a sign of honour, of authority and of force. The early Church gloried in it, and the Church of God will never cease to glory in it.

The Cross is the moral centre of Christianity. It is the living magnet which retains the Church in true relation to her Lord. Never an hour but in some corner of the globe Christians meet to perpetuate the memory of the Cross in the solemn act of the Holy Communion. This phenomenon is not due to the imagination or to the piety of Christian devotees. The power of attraction is not in themselves but in the Cross. Many who do not attempt to explain its mystery are compelled to yield to its attraction, and even amongst those who profess no love for Jesus Christ there is a certain awe and respect for the Cross of Christ. The word

of Jesus has been fulfilled. He has drawn all men unto Him. . . . What changes have been effected in human life as the result of that uplifting? We may say generally that Jesus Christ by His death has changed the face of the world *ex*ternally, and the life of all true believers *in*ternally.

I. There has been and is an external attraction. Jesus Christ has drawn men to Himself from two things which prevailed in His day, viz.: idolatry and inhumanity.

(*a*) *Idolatry.* At the hour when Jesus ascended Mount Calvary the civilized world was a vast temple of idols. "All was God except God." In Athens, the capital of the world's art, philosophy, poetry and drama, idolatry had attained to such colossal dimensions that the satirist declared "it was easier to find a God than a man." Everywhere temples reared their heads. Everywhere gods abounded. At Rome, the world's political capital, the gods rivalled those of Greece and they included finally the Emperors before whose statues a thin thread of blue censer smoke ascended. With the exception of one small nation the entire world was polytheistic. Persians adored the sun as the symbol of the Divinity. Egyptians paid homage to cat and crocodile. Elsewhere the generative forces of nature portrayed in

disgusting physical forms were worshipped, while the more refined and speculative worshipped vague "principles" of life and heat and motion. Men almost everywhere offered to the creature or to nebulous principles, the homage due to the living and Eternal God. To perverted worship was joined corrupt manners. The very gods themselves were invested with the lowest of human vices. They were gluttons and drunkards and filled with lust. The worship of Artemis entailed upon the priestesses who served in her temples the sacrifice of their virtue. Prostitution became a religious act. Licentiousness of the worst kind was practiced as part of the religious "mysteries," as indeed it is at this day in India. Roman Emperors whose lives upon earth had been openly corrupt, were deified, and at death became objects of veneration. Such was the state of the world religiously at the death of Christ. The peoples were decaying through rotting religions. In the midst of this universal corruption the Cross of Christ was erected. Seven weeks later twelve men commenced to preach to the world Christ, crucified and risen, as the Lord of mankind. Jews were scandalized. Greeks and Romans were amused. But the apostles preached in the teeth of all opposition. They were men with-

out wealth, prestige or arms. They were untravelled and inexperienced. The popular religions of the day and the chief political power of the day were both arrayed against them. Undaunted, they proclaimed Christ and the idols commenced to fall. To the priestly deification of lust they opposed the Cross with its terrible spectacle of the holy Son of God suffering for human sin. To the multitude of gods they opposed the One living and true God become Incarnate in Jesus Christ. And the Cross triumphed. For three centuries the war between Christ and paganism endured and then the truth conquered. The symbol of victory flashed everywhere. Since that time wherever the Cross has been uplifted the idols have fallen. Even nations that do not definitely own the sway of the Saviour have been compelled to modify their manners. Human sacrifices, suttee, cannibalism and other horrors which formerly obtained religious sanctions are now universally reprobated. It will not do to attribute the passing of these nightmares to the march of civilization. Civilization, in *its best form,* is the product of the Christian spirit. We are reaping in that humanity which has abolished the ancient abominations, the fruit of that seed which Christ has sown in the hearts of good

men during the centuries. To the shame of our generation, it claims this harvest as its own, while it seeks to obliterate from the page of history the record of the action of Jesus Christ in preparing for us the privileges into which so easily we enter. It is the Cross alone which has triumphed over idolatry.

(*b*) A second thing over which the Cross has triumphed is *inhumanity*. Inhumanity is the necessary accompaniment of idolatry, whatever be the form idolatry assumes in ancient or modern life, amongst savages or the civilized. Where men reject the true God they soon come to despise their fellows. The Roman and Greek gods were the creations of man's mind. Many of them had sprung from the earth. As gods, so men. It followed as the result of their materialistic beliefs that neither Greeks nor Romans believed in the Divine origin of man. Man *as* man was not respected. Power and genius alone were worshipped. Ordinary men were ignored or scorned. The plebeian was merely "animated dirt." The pagan conception of man is made clear to us by a consideration of four things—its treatment of children and women and its conception of slavery and war.

(1) Its treatment of *children*. We are left in no sort of doubt as to the position which

children occupied in Rome or Greece. Contemporary writers have left in permanent form a photograph of the child as pagan life conceived it. In Rome children had no real rights. The father was the proprietor of the family, and his offspring belonged to him in the absolute sense. If he did not care to rear an unpromising infant, a law authorized him to terminate its career. "In his father's house the adult son of a Roman citizen was a mere thing confounded by the laws with the moveables, the cattle and the slaves, whom the capricious master might alienate or destroy without being responsible to any earthly tribunal."[1] Amongst the Greeks the public castigation of children before altars was permitted to the extent of blood shedding and even death. Such philosophers as Plato and Aristotle urged parents to repudiate their offspring if they found their support to be too heavy a burden, or if the children betrayed any weakness which threatened to be an incubus upon the State. The State was everything; the individual nothing. Weakness was considered as a crime. For the afflicted child there was no hospital nor institution of any sort in which it might find asylum. It was at the mercy of a heartless State. Those

[1] Gibbon, "Decline and Fall."

revolutionaries of our time who would make an atheistic State the supreme arbiter of human destiny might receive some illumination through a study of ancient history.

(2) Where children are thus treated we may naturally expect to find a low status of woman. The pagan world at the time of Christ reveals an astonishing spectacle. When the "glories of the Roman matron" have been sung, and the clever women of the ancient world shown in free intercourse with society, and a number of noble ladies, the charm of that world, passed across the stage, the fact remains that *for the majority* the lot of woman was ignominious. In Greece, enclosed within her father's house, the maiden was subject absolutely to her father's will. If she longed for a larger life and desired a public career, a terrible price was demanded of her; often not less than the sacrifice of her chastity. In Rome, the girl was part of the furniture of the father's home—to be disposed of by him in the same way that he would order his household effects. If the father died, the maiden became the chattel of the responsible male head of the household. When the maiden became a wife she was a chattel simply transferred from a father or a guardian to a husband; but she remained a chattel still. What wonder that woman's

nature thus outraged and suppressed took its revenge! Intrigue, abandonment and infidelity were woman's retaliation for man's treatment of her.

(3) If those who were bound to men by ties of blood were thus treated what should we expect to be the condition of *slaves?* Gibbon estimates the number of slaves within the Roman Empire in the time of Claudius to be about sixty millions. They were worth, in the public market-place, from about five shillings to fifteen pounds sterling. Slavery was not an accidental part of Roman life: it had become an essential thing. Roman statesmen and orators defended it. It was not considered to be a necessary evil but a positive good. The slaves had no legal rights. The veil of modesty was ruthlessly torn from men and women alike. They were de-humanized as much as possible. When they were put up for public sale the clothing was removed from their bodies. In all the shame of nudity they were compelled to stand, a gazing stock for the city. In the entertainment of children the slaves were requisitioned and often compelled to play the part of animals. Frequently they bore some fetter while upon forehead or breast or arm the fatal brand of servitude proclaimed to all their humiliation. At the entire

mercy of their owners they could not appeal to any court for redress of injury. They were forbidden to defend themselves in the courts. Thousands of them were specially trained for fighting in the circus against men who, well armed, were certain to encompass their death. And all this was the rule at Rome—capital of the civilized world. All was done in the name of civilization.

(4) If, in normal conditions, these abominations prevailed, it is easy to comprehend the depth of degradation into which men sank in time of war when every base and bloody passion was unchained. War, in our time, with its "humanities," its Red Cross and its codes of "honour" is the grimmest of tragedies, the most horrible of spectacles. But then there was not even the pretence of a code of honour and there were no "humanities." The main object of war was the annihilation of the enemy to the accompaniment of brutality and torture. The victors did not burden their regiments with a host of prisoners needing food and attention. When they *did* reserve captured prisoners of war it was more often than not for the more horrible death of the arena. In painting the picture in these sombre colours it is not forgotten that there was much nobility and mercy in the old Pagan world.

That world was not a simple festering mass of corruption utterly unrelieved by a single ray of beauty. What has to be remembered, however, is, that when the very best has been said of that time, the picture we have drawn from competent historians remains unchallenged. Whatever of good there was does not alter the fact that these evils flourished, not as admitted discords in the music of life but as part of the music itself as it was understood.—In the midst of this ancient life, so socially incomplete, and in parts cruel, the Cross of Christ was raised on high. Seven weeks later, twelve men went forth to proclaim Christ as the Lord of all life. Commencing at Jerusalem they gradually spread out until at length the Capital of the Empire was evangelized. To the unnatural treatment of child life they opposed the gentleness and love of Jesus for children. They told how He had laid His hands upon their heads and blessed them, and how He had made the child the model of the true life. To their low thought of woman, they opposed the friendship of Jesus for women equally with men and showed how He had admitted to His intimacy even the socially disfranchised and the morally debased in order to redeem and to elevate them. To the abomination of slavery they opposed the act of

the Lord of all voluntarily suffering the death of a slave in order to purchase liberty for every human soul. And they repeated His word "One is your master and all ye are brethren." To the horrors of war they opposed the gospel of peace and reconciliation by the Cross, as the surest way to end forever those feelings of hatred which end in violent barbaric explosions.

Through the preaching of the Cross men of all ranks in life and of all races became brothers in a new and Divine family. Everywhere human life received a new sanctity. Children became the objects of an unheard-of solicitude. Women were restored to their proper place as the comrades of men in the highest relationships and offices: the weak and crippled were tended with a new care; injuries were forgiven in place of being revenged; men were loved as men and as brothers in Christ. The Cross conquered. Wherever its shadow fell, the hateful things of human life fell away. Not in a moment was this done, but it *was* done. The work of penetration has always depended upon the degree of coöperation which man offers to his God. Wherever this coöperation has been given child life has been respected, woman elevated, slavery abolished and wars ended. Wherever this co-

operation has been refused or but partially rendered, there the old vices have flourished in greater or lesser degree. No one pretends that the programme of Christ has yet been fully accomplished. But this must not blind us to the fact of the miracle that has already been wrought wherever the Evangel has worked as leaven. There are dark and cruel places still flourishing even in Christendom. Not yet have children come fully unto their own, not yet are all the slaves free. And wars still threaten us, although the best conscience of the world is earnestly set against them. This is not to proclaim the ineffectiveness of the Gospel; it is rather an indictment of the moral weakness and cowardice and selfishness of men for their refusal to adopt the only means of securing their complete emancipation from all the evils of life. For the Cross still has its enemies as in the early days of the Church. Atheism, materialism and the idolatry of worldliness are arrayed against it. They fear its influence. But history will repeat itself and complete the story which has been but partly written. Jesus Christ who has hitherto regenerated that world which owns His sway, must complete His work until the entire earth is created anew. Light must conquer darkness. Holiness must

master vice. Life must banish death. The day must dawn when all the shadows shall depart from the life of man and the whole world be bathed in the healing light of God.

II. It is an immense task to have accomplished—this correction of the social vices and this change in life's outlook, but the main thing Jesus Christ purposes is not simply the reform of the world's behaviour, but the permanent cure of its heart. There is no guarantee that reformed manners will endure, unless the *cause* of human evil is attacked and cured. The Cross, therefore, if it is really to triumph over evil, must be able to influence the mainspring of human life. It must triumph *internally* as well as externally. This always has been its real victory. What is the cause of all the infelicity and heartlessness which have invaded our world? Are there many roots, or is there but one main root from which have sprung the poisonous fruits that envenom human life? Many secondary causes may be alleged, but there is one primary cause which is the source of all the rest. Selfishness, some call it, but the Bible in uttering the single word "sin" brings us face to face with the awful secret of all that oppresses mankind. Men have wrangled over the term "sin," now denying the reality of the thing itself, now explaining

it in theological, or philosophical or psychological terminology. At the Cross of Christ this evil thing is demonstrated at work in complete action. We behold it there unmasked and unlabelled, but plainly discernible for what it is. The Cross reveals the real nature of sin. It is not verbally defined, but what is far more terrible and striking, its nature and action are *demonstrated.* There, upon the Cross, transfixed to its wood, is the Divine Lord. For three and thirty years in His incarnate life, He has lived with men, sharing their poverty, healing their sick, restoring the fallen to the ways of virtue, filling with love and hope hearts that had become desolate and hardened, raising the dead, blessing children and everywhere preaching the good news of Salvation. His life has been one long benediction. Sinful and sorrowful people were made whole and filled with joy when He met them. In Himself He has lived the perfect life. Tempted in all points as we are, He has never yielded to evil. He came to reveal the Father God to mankind. His "mighty works" remain witnesses to His claim that He is the Saviour of the world. And what is His fate? He becomes a victim of human evil, voluntarily submitting Himself to the sacrifice of life itself. He might easily resist this attack, but He *bears* the

Sin of the world so that man shall see what sin is and voluntarily forsake it.—Nearly all the types of human evil are represented in the terrible drama of the Cross. Each is to have a hand in this fearful demonstration. Hypocrisy is represented in the chief priests and scribes. Uncleanness in Herod. Lying in the false witnesses. Injustice in Pontius Pilate. Treachery in Judas Iscariot. Cruelty in the soldiers. Theft in the gamblers at the foot of the cross. All types of evil are thus gathered against the Lord and His Christ, and all the types are but modes of one underlying principle—Sin. See then what sin does to the perfect Christ—to Him who has wrought nothing but good for mankind. It blasphemes Him, scourges Him, spits in His face, mocks Him, lies about Him, makes sport of His sorrow and suffering, and finally drives Him from the earth.—*That* is what sin is capable of doing to the Highest, the Best. And in doing this it demonstrates its own nature. The tragedy of Good Friday was not a passing incident in the world's history: it was a temporal demonstration at a given point of the perpetual outrage which on the part of man is always being directed against God. What men did to Jesus on Good Friday in the physical realm, mankind does to God to-day in the moral realm by its sin.—It wounds Him

and seeks to be rid of Him. All His goodness to it goes for nothing. God is simply unwelcome and His law regarded as oppressive. No academic account of sin can succeed in bringing its meaning home to us like this demonstration of its virulence in the Cross of Christ. To make mankind *see* what it is, is the first part of the triumph of the Cross.

A second thing the Cross does is to reveal what *God thinks* about sin and what His holiness demands should be done with it. It is clear that sin, the aim of which is to challenge the Eternal law, cannot pass without some sign of displeasure on the part of the Eternal Goodness. A silent God would encourage a sinning world. When we examine history, we discover that God *has* remarked upon sin in ways that are unmistakable. In many a calamity, through many a pain, in personal remorse, in national disasters, in international conflicts and in a thousand other ways God has taught men that "he who sins against him hurts his own soul" and that "the wages of sin is death." But more than this was needed. The world required one great advertisement in concrete and convincing form of the terrible consequences of sin. *That advertisement was given in the Cross of Christ,* and it remains a permanent memory of mankind. If the Cross, as

we have seen, reveals the venom of Sin toward God, it also shows us what ravages it works upon man. As Son of man Christ hangs upon the Cross. He represents Man as truly as He represents God. In His dying we behold *Man*—the victim of sin. We see the sinner caught at length in his own devices. We see him brought under the judgment of God. Jesus, in the immensity of His charity, permits us to see in His own body this public spectacle of what sin does for every individual. Let us follow the steps of His *via Dolorosa.* First, sin betrays its victim, impressing upon his lips the Judas kiss. Jesus, prey to the perfidy of a false-hearted disciple, shows us what the traitor in our hearts will yet do for us unless, by God's mercy, he is transformed. Whatever form evil assumes, we may be morally certain that one day we shall be betrayed by it. Vanity will turn upon us and mock us. Lust will hand over to our tormentors the members which have willingly obeyed its behests. Selfishness will leave us with a desolate heart. Sin betrays. This is the commencement of sorrows. It goes on to scourge us, to make sport of us, to drive us from place to place bound dupes of its tyranny, to weigh us down with a cross, to put us to cruel pain, to torment us with thirst, to drive us into the darkness of despair, and

finally to engulf us in death. That terrible procession of pains and sorrows endured by Jesus constitutes the most penetrating advertisement of the dread consequences of sin. Every item in that list has its moral counterpart in the souls of sinners abandoned to evil. These pains are the *natural* consequences of sin: none the less they are the judgment of God upon it. In that willing, Divine victim of the Cross we may read God's estimate of "the natural history of sin."

"To know thoroughly the disease is half the cure." The Cross represents a triumph by revealing to mankind the inner nature of sin and its consequences for God and man. But it is more than a revelation. It is a real instrument of victory. It was a personal victory for Jesus in that, bearing sin even unto death, He rose again in triumph, thus proving that "death no more hath dominion over him." It was mainly, however, a *representative* victory. In Him man recovered himself. Christ conquered on man's behalf. The condition of any person's victory over sin is that he shall be possessed with the mind of Christ and so be vitally related to Him who represented all men. That condition is, in the New Testament, termed "belief." It is a simple fact of experience that persons who are thus "one" with

Christ become regenerated and so free from the dominion of sin. The centre of life is changed. The root of evil is attacked and destroyed. Men in reality become "new creatures in Christ." In all who are "one" with Him, the Saviour repeats His own victory over sin. This experience of redemption is offered to all the world, but it can never be appreciated by self-satisfied persons who regard themselves as "not like other men": it is for sinners who are oppressed by Sin and who ardently long to be free from its bondage.

The Cross has lost none of its magnetic power. It "draws" still. But as between a magnet and a needle there must be a natural affinity which makes call and response a reality, so between the Cross and the sinner there must also be affinity. This affinity is composed of desire, penitence, humility and faith. Without these, the Cross "draws" in vain. To the Divine "I *will* draw" it is necessary that man respond "I *will* come." For in virtue of our nature, the power to turn to God, or to refuse Him lies in the human will. When that will responds, then the regenerator of the world is known in experience as the regenerator of the individual soul.

XII

THE EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

THE great shaking to which the world has been subjected during the last few years has left many things, that were once thought to be settled, quite insecure. Political institutions, social conventions, and many personal relations have been rudely disturbed. And religion has not escaped. Men have been compelled to overhaul their beliefs, and to demand whether or not they are equal to the new and strange demands made upon them. We ought not to be troubled about this: we should rather rejoice in it. When foundations are challenged, it is well to examine them. If the challenge be unwarranted, so much the better; if it be justified, wisdom demands that security should be established immediately.

Unmistakably the Christian faith has been challenged by its enemies, both on speculative and practical grounds. Its doctrine of God is said to be obviously out of relation with the

facts of life as the late war has disclosed them, while it is declared to have broken down as a practical force in the life of man. And our answer must be, with Mr. Chesterton, that "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting: it has been found difficult and not tried." Some private theologies have undoubtedly been roughly shaken in the world tempest, but the doctrine of God as disclosed to us by Jesus Christ our Lord has not been in the remotest way affected. God has not ceased to be Father because some members of His family, in their abuse of liberty, have deliberately run amok with open knife to wound their brothers and sisters. A moral force for righteousness does not fail when men repudiate it and accept another and alien law of life. For moral power works morally and not with material means to enforce it. Christianity as a system is not discredited because men have got into trouble through rejecting it: it is rather the other way about.

But one thing remains undisturbed, unshaken, untouched, amidst all the wreckage of life—it is the reality of Christian experience. People who have had experience of God's wonderful mercy and grace do not and cannot doubt that because of any happening in the outer world. They who have drunk deeply

of domestic happiness do not doubt the reality of their experience when they encounter in life the horrible fireside tragedies which make one sick with shame. Experience of the good, the beautiful, and the true can never be discounted by the appearance of the bad, the ugly, and the false elsewhere. And such positive experience is *evidence* of a high order that man can and should delight in the good, the beautiful, and the true. Exactly thus is it with Christian experience. It has a strong evidential value. It witnesses to the reality of a Divine force in man's life, and in doing so calls all men and women to share in that reality. It cries out to the whole world: "Behold me. . . . God is at work within me. . . . He is doing great things for me. . . . Although He is hidden, yet His work is manifest—the effect witnesses to the Cause. . . . Acknowledge this to be the work of God, and submit yourselves to that same working, then you also shall rejoice in this like experience."

I am assuming, of course, that there is such a thing as a definite Christian experience which *per se* resolves itself into invincible evidence on behalf of the grace of God. Is such an assumption justified? Without doubt, unless it be true that we are living in the midst of a

vast illusion, or that mankind be afflicted with incurable insanity. The specific Christian experience is this—that man, through the revelation brought by our Lord Jesus Christ, really "knows" God in a moral sense; that he knows who God is, what He thinks about us, and what He sacrifices for us. Further, that through surrender to Him and confidence in Him, the soul actually experiences a cleansing from its sins, a reinforcement of Divine power for the purposes of life, a new spirit of love toward mankind, and a new and deep joy in God. This is a specific Christian experience, related entirely to Jesus Christ, and certain as anything in this world can be. It is not the experience of one age, nor of one type of mind, nor of one climate. It is the experience of every age from the time of Christ onwards, of every type of mind and of every climate.

An Apostle of the first century writes: "We know that we have passed from death unto life." "We know that we are of God." "I know Him Whom I trusted." St. Bernard of the Middle Ages writes and sings in exactly the same strain. And Bendigo, the prize-fighter, falling under the saving spell of Christ, becomes a transfigured man, and speaks of Christ in his own poor language, as did St. Paul, St. John, and St. Bernard in their richer

tongue. There is a specific Christian experience which makes men and women radiant, which transforms their passions, which enables them to overcome temptation, which renders them courageous, which lifts them above the depressions of life, which makes them more than conquerors. Every Christian hymn book bears witness to this fundamental fact. Examine any church hymn book and carefully note the implications of all the hymns and the personal note that sounds through the majority of them, and then say whether it is or is not true that Christian experience is a reality. To the witness of hymns may be added that of Christian biography. Read the story of any great Christian life, and before long you will inevitably come to the passage which describes a spiritual crisis—sometimes called "conversion"—and from which everything worthy dates. Can it be that all biographers, from St. Augustine downwards, have been engaged in a vast conspiracy to deceive both themselves and the world for which they wrote? If the ordinary laws of evidence are applied to Christian biography, what does this universal witness to the specific Christian experience mean?

Or turn into any large mission hall or Salvation Army barracks, and there, in another language, the same story will be told. Mr.

Begbie, in "Twice-Born Men," gave to the world a collection of striking testimonies gathered from the Salvation Army converts. And these roughest of rough men—criminals many of them—had one story to tell—they had been redeemed by Jesus Christ and turned into new creatures. St. Augustine, the brilliant scholar, and "Jack the Terror," widely separated in time, in social status, and in intellectual power, are brought together in the common Christian experience of the saving work of Jesus Christ. All this is in the region of facts. There can be no disputing them. Rationalism has employed every weapon in its armoury of malice against the facts of Christian experience, but all that remains of its attack is a pile of scrap iron. Mr. Bradlaugh once challenged the late Hugh Price Hughes to a debate on Christianity. Mr. Hughes replied with alacrity. "Certainly. Nothing would be more pleasing to me; but as debates on conventional lines usually lead to nothing, let us hold a debate on new lines. I will undertake to bring a hundred diverse men and women on to the platform of St. James's Hall, who shall witness to the saving work of Christ in their lives. You can cross-examine them as much as you like. But you, on your part, are to bring one hundred men and women who have been redeemed from a sinful life by

means of your atheistic teaching." Mr. Bradlaugh declined the offer. He was a wise man —too wise to risk the greatest collapse of his life in public. The Christian experience is too well established to be destroyed.

But Christianity invites all mankind to this experience. It makes no exceptions. It does not ask all men to express themselves in the same way. It imposes no yoke of bondage upon the mind. It leaves mind and temperament as free as God made them to be. But it says to all mankind: "Differ as you may in national characteristics, in mental outlook, in social conventions, you have all one common need—the need of God. It belongs to your essential humanity. It has become more pressing because of human sin. There is no sin that has stained your life which may not be cured—your very sins, crimson, may become white as snow. There is no weakness that cannot be overcome, no hate that may not be changed to love, no fear that may not be transfigured into joy. You can really know God, rejoice in Him, be saved by Him, commune with Him. And the condition is faith and repentance—both. Your whole nature, as it is, placed in the hands that were pierced for you, will be remade by Him. He is the Saviour of all, the Lord of all."

Enter, my friends, into this experience. It follows the surrender of the life to God. And when once it is known, it cannot be fairly doubted. It will become the very life of the man.

In the presence of conflicting forces, of strain, of attack, the man who has really entered into a Christian experience will say with F. W. H. Myers:

> Whoso has felt the Spirit of the Highest
> Cannot confound, nor doubt Him, nor deny.
> Yea, with one voice, O world, though thou deniest,
> Stand thou on *that* side—for on this am I.

XIII

THE PRACTICAL QUESTION—WILL CHRISTIANITY "WORK" TO-DAY?

THOUSANDS of persons who are persuaded that Christianity has a real Gospel to preach to the world are by no means sure that its Gospel will "work" in the modern world. I have a letter before me in which the writer—a shrewd man—says, "I frankly admit that the Gospel has proved effective in the lives of vast numbers of individuals both spiritually and, to a certain extent, socially, but is it not perfectly obvious that Christianity has not been effective in the world as a whole—not even in that part of it we call Christendom? It has not changed society. It has not prevented war. Was the Holy Roman Empire a great success, either religiously or socially? I express the feeling common to most men of my acquaintance when I say that while I regard the 'Gospel'—as you term it—as academically sound and beautifully ideal, it cannot operate with anything like complete success in the world as we

know it at present. You may say this is due in great part to the pointblank refusal of mankind to live according to its rule. That I admit. But, then, *can* we live according to its rule? Is it possible, under modern conditions, to live that care-free life sketched by Christ and to proceed upon the conviction that if we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness other things will be 'added unto us'?" This letter which has the merit of frankness undoubtedly expresses what large numbers of people in our time feel.

The intellectual difficulties concerning Christianity are not nearly so acute as the practical difficulties of the Gospel in its social application. When everything is reduced to its simplest forms, the real antagonism to the Gospel centres itself in a complete scepticism as to the practicability of our Lord's word, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and these things shall be *added* to you." Men quite frankly do not believe this. They think that the life of simplicity as set forth by Jesus may work very well in primitive communities, but it cannot work in a complex life like our own.

One thing is certain: the result of the "secular" method of living has been wholly disastrous. Life has become an unholy scram-

ble in which not always the best, but the strongest, the most pushful, and the least scrupulous, have "survived." The law of the jungle has become the law of human life. The things that Christ promised should be "added" have become the first things for the majority of people. Food and clothing and shelter are necessities of human life, but they have entirely filled the foreground of man's ambition, until a larder, a wardrobe, and a mansion—always growing—have come to be the *summum bonum* of existence. For multitudes the main purpose of life is to obtain the *best* food, the *best* clothing, and the *best* shelter—and the most of the best. But as all available food, clothing, and shelter are not of the best—inferior qualities being almost necessary—the race begins as to who shall obtain the best. It is striking to observe the emphasis which Jesus places upon covetousness as a mother sin. He declared that this vice was responsible for the choking of the best things in life; that it was wholly illusive and that it led directly to most of the world's social evils.

And the world to-day knows that He is right. The old way of living has broken down. Say what we may about the part that bad politics played in forcing the Great War upon the world: *the real cause of that war was*

covetousness. Men were after larders and markets and wardrobes and luxuries. There would have been no European war but for the tragic fact that second things had become first things. The Bolshevists and the Marxians, in their bovine way, are well aware of this; hence they cry out for the destruction of the system which has brought such misery upon the world. But men who are neither Bolshevists nor Marxians are just as certain that the world has been on the wrong track, and they also are seeking a new method of living, although it is not the method of destruction. Amid the wreckage of the modern world the most hopeful sign we perceive is the awakening of so many minds to the real cause of our trouble: that we have turned from the way of Christ as being impossible and trodden the contrary way, which has ended in tragedy.

But *is Christ's way of life practicable?* Where are the guarantees that if men live according to this way, and seek the Kingdom first, the rest will be really "added": that all the needs of life will be met—and more? The only guarantee Jesus gives is the character of God. He rests everything upon that. The Father, He tells us, is the source of all good. We have to depend upon Him for all we receive. He it is who supplies all our raw ma-

terial, without which we could make nothing at all. Whether we own or disown Him, we are His pensioners. But He never betrays us. He clothes flowers of the field and feeds the birds; how, then, could He betray His own children? He works for us by means of laws. Obey those laws and all will be well. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be *added*." That is the sole guarantee Jesus gives on behalf of a normal and happy social State. But the modern world does not believe it is good enough. It seems to be insubstantial, nebulous, unreal. It lacks the element of "cash down"—that substantial guarantee which the war and the income tax have done so much to lessen. It introduces that vaporous thing—as men believe it to be—*faith*. At the last, therefore, the whole matter resolves itself into one question—do we really believe in God sufficiently to risk our future upon the stability of His character?

When we have exhausted all our logic we are compelled to return to that simple and fundamental question and answer it. Thousands of simple souls do believe in God in this way. They live on Christ's lines and they abide in peace. They are never betrayed. Every minister of religion knows widows and others who are without resources save in the

love and care of God. They are happy, trustful people, who do their best and leave the rest with God, and who do in all their thoughts set the Kingdom of God first. And the other things are always "added." To some extent the old miracle of the unemptied barrel and the undrained cruse of oil is continued in their experience. *How* the provision is made is somewhat of a mystery, but ask people of this order whether it be not true that their faith has never been betrayed! The community, however, does not believe in God in this simple way. Human life is not organized on Christ's lines, hence it is not at peace. It has taken another way, with the fatal results that are apparent to all.

If we ask, then, whether the Gospel will "work" in the modern world, the answer is, Certainly, if men will give it its opportunity; but so long as they place the emphasis on the wrong things and put second things in the first place it cannot work, and its beneficent programme is bound to remain unfulfilled so far as society is concerned. For the Gospel does not work magically; it can only work morally. The life principle it conveys becomes fruitful only in a congenial soil. If we ask why men hesitate to receive it and to live by it, the answer is that they are afraid. *Fear is*

at the bottom of most of our social troubles. Nations arm against each other because of fear. Men hurry to be rich because of fear. The whole system of grab which urges men to get as much of the world's goods as they can and as soon as they can is based upon fear —fear that if they fail there will be nothing left for them at the end. And Christ presses the contrary of all that. He urges the child's trust and condemns the beast's leap. Trust God, He says. Live according to His law. Put His Kingdom first. Reduce all life to a single service. Refuse to be torn between mammon and God. Do this and all the parts of life, personal and social, will fall into place. Society will then be organized on the lines of a Father's Kingdom and not on the lines of an African jungle. That great bogey, fear, will vanish in the broad light of divinely fraternal love. Inequalities will remain, but all will be happy, since in the Kingdom of the Father there can be no room for tyrannies, trickeries, and wars.

A counsel of perfection, people reply, with a shrug of the shoulder. But is it? We have had the counsel of destruction; what is there left for us but to try Christ's way or return, like very fools, to the blasted path upon which our feet have been burned? It is a counsel

of perfection, if you like, to this extent: that it can never completely operate socially until the world accepts it. We are cynically reminded that we "cannot change human nature." Well, is that quite so certain? It has been changed a good deal since the beginning, and all the change for good has been in the direction of Christ. The beast is dying and the child is emerging. Miraculous changes have occurred in individuals. Lives, tigerish and hurtful, have under Christ been transformed completely. And what is possible for the individual is possible for the race.

One thing is certain: that a new vision is dawning upon the minds of millions of people of a new society which answers completely to our Lord's conception of the Kingdom of God. The Church has an unparalleled opportunity of proclaiming anew her Gospel in all its completeness, and of pressing home upon men this new point that the complete acceptance of the Gospel carries with it the establishment of that very social order of which the best people are dreaming; while its rejection is not only a refusal to accept a spiritual boon, it is a definite and deliberate wound inflicted upon society, since it hinders the only means of true progress. There has never been such an occasion for a grand appeal on behalf of

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